

# Agnew Restates White House's Amnesty Stance

By Lou Cannon

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Vice President Spiro T. Agnew said yesterday that the nation must be "unyielding" in punishing deserters and draft evaders because they have not "admitted that they are wrong."

In a speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars the Vice President said that amnesty for draft evaders would encourage Americans to avoid their responsibilities to the government.

"When they recognize their mistakes and accept the punishment as the natural consequence of those mistakes, certainly some may be entitled to another chance," Agnew said. "But these draft dodgers and deserters have not admitted that they are wrong; on the contrary, they say that the country is wrong and they are right.

"Until they recognize that it is they who have erred and not the country, we must be unyielding in how we treat them," he said.

Agnew, expressing a position similar to the one conveyed in a three-page position paper issued by the White House Sunday, said that arguments based on the amnesty decrees of Abraham Lincoln were "specious."

The Lincoln decree, Agnew said, were not related to draft laws and also had "strings attached."

"Amnesties regarding Union Army deserters required them to return to their units and serve out their enlistments with forfeiture of pay and allowances and, in some instances, with additional time tacked on to their original tours of duty," Agnew said. "Can those of you who have served in the armed forces envisage a more difficult punishment for a deserter than to serve out the remainder of his time in his old unit just back from combat?"

The White House position paper on amnesty cited 34 separate incidents of amnesty in U.S. history, none unconditional.

Agnew said that the United States could not afford to establish such a precedent and would not do so under the Nixon administration.

The Agnew speech, one of

the few he has given since the President's re-election, was devoted almost entirely to the amnesty issue and to a defense of the U.S. role in South Vietnam.

"The long and bitter debate in America over the Vietnam war has come to focus on one basic issue: whether the United States would honor its commitment to defend a brave ally against calculated aggression or, whether in the face of great difficulty and harsh criticism, it would simply cut its losses and abandon its commitments," Agnew said.

"The President chose the former course, knowing that the cold searching eye of history and the conscience of the American people would never condone his taking the easy way," the Vice President added.

Agnew said the President's choice of the "tough high road" had been "worth it" for America. Speaking on the basis of his recent trip to eight Southeast Asian countries the Vice President said "we have done our part to preserve the environment for growth and cooperation."

He mentioned four nations specifically—Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand—which he said had been strengthened because of the U. S. involvement in Vietnam.

"Not one country that I visited on this or any of my five trips to Asia in the four years I've been Vice President has ever indicated any dissatisfaction with the role of the United States," Agnew said. "All have seen us as a force supporting their desire for self-determination and freedom in the region."

The Vice President's defense of the administration's Vietnam policies came at the annual congressional dinner of the VFW.

The veterans organization presented its award for "outstanding service to the nation in Congress" to Sen. John Stennis (D-Miss.), who is recovering from wounds sustained when the senator was shot and robbed outside his Washington home.

The award was accepted by John Hampton Stennis, a Mississippi legislator and son of the senator.