

MUSKIE REGRETS SILENCE ON WAR

Says He Voiced His Doubts
Privately to Johnson

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WASHINGTON, March 30 — Senator Edmund S. Muskie is sorry now that he did not make public as far back as 1965 his "real doubts about our involvement" in the Vietnam war. Instead, he said, he voiced his concerns privately to President Johnson.

The Senator from Maine expressed his regret about past silence on the war effort during a 90-minute appearance on the "David Frost Show." The interview, taped several days ago, will be televised tomorrow night in New York and most major cities. It will be seen in New York on Channel 5 at 8:30 P.M.

As a leading, though undeclared candidate for the Democratic Presidential nomination

in 1972, Mr. Muskie is said to consider his brief history of opposition to the war as his chief hurdle. He defended the Johnson Administration's conduct of the war while campaigning in 1968 for the Vice-Presidency and did not publicly declare his opposition to a continued American role until October, 1970.

But the Senator told Mr. Frost that he returned from an inspection trip in Asia in 1965 with private doubts about the war.

"There are two ways," he said, "and they're both legitimate ways, of trying to influence public policy. And I guess the tendency is, when the President is a member of your own party, and you're a Senator, to try to express your doubts directly to him, in order to give him a chance to get the benefit of your views."

Senator Muskie said he had done that, "but I've often wished that I'd expressed my doubts publicly at that time."

He was far less hesitant to criticize President Nixon's conduct of the war. Reasserting his support for a complete American withdrawal by the

end of the current year, Senator Muskie said he had "real doubts about the wisdom" of the military assaults into Cambodia last year and Laos this year.

The American stake in the war is now dependent on combat operations in three countries, which creates "the risk of a longer involvement," Mr. Muskie said.

The national elections in South Vietnam next fall "ought to be the test" of Saigon's political viability, Senator Muskie said. "If we tell them clearly we're getting out by such and such a date, the end of this year, say, they then have the opportunity to take maximum advantage of that election to establish a solid political base that their people will support."

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