

[First question, asked by Frank Cormier:] Mindful that "end the war" was one of your major campaign themes in 1968, mindful that our bombings in Indochina now are at a five-year high according to the Pentagon, mindful that troops are still coming out but even more are going in to Thailand and the Seventh Fleet - I wonder if you can say with any confidence that you can end the war by January 20th of next year?

[Answer:] Well, Mr. Cormier, we have made great progress in ending the war, and particularly in ending American involvement in the war. Since you have recounted the record to an extent, let me recount it also from the positive side.

[When] we came into office, there were 540,000 Americans in Vietnam; our casualties were running as high as 300 a week; the cost was 22 billion dollars a year. We have taken out 500,000 men since that time; our casualties have been reduced 95% down to two - that's too many, but that's from 300 to two. As far as the cost is concerned, instead of 22 billion a year it's down to seven billion a year.

As far as the situation on the negotiating front is concerned, instead of being in a position where we did not have a positive offer on the table, we have made what Mr. Brinkley of NBC characterized last night as being a very constructive offer, one in which in return for an all-Indochina ceasefire and the return of our POWs and an accounting for all of our missing in action, that we would stop all military activities in Indochina and we withdraw all Americans - all those that remain - within four months. Now, having reached this position at this time, we believe that that is an excellent record.

The only thing that we have not done is to do what the Communists have asked, and that is to impose a Communist government on the people of South Vietnam against their will. This we will not do, because that would reward aggression, it would encourage that kind of aggression and reduce the chances of peace all over the world in the years to come, and it would dishonor the United States of America.

On the negotiating front we have informed the North Vietnamese, after consultation with the government of Vietnam, that we will return to the negotiating table in Paris on April [sic] 13th, Thursday.* We have been informed by the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong that they too will return on that date.

We have returned to the negotiating table, or will return to it, on the assumption that the North Vietnamese are prepared to negotiate in a constructive and serious way. We will be prepared to negotiate in that way. If those negotiations go forward in a constructive and serious way, this war can be ended, and it can be ended well before January 20th.

If they do not go forward on that basis, the United States will continue to meet its commitments, our bombing as far as that's concerned, our mining, is for the purpose only of preventing Communist aggression from succeeding, to protect the remaining Americans - 40,000 or so that are still in Vietnam - and to have some bargaining position in getting our POWs back.

One last point with regard to the POWs. I know that every American is concerned about these [stammers, repeats] these men; I have been somewhat concerned about them. [Tension in voice.]

I would only say that I've had some experience - and a great deal of experience, as a matter of fact, in this past year - in dealing with Communist leaders. I find that making a bargain with them is not easy, and you get something from them only when you have something they want to get from you. The only way we're going to get our POWs back is to hit - to be doing something to them, and that means hitting military targets in North Vietnam, retaining a residual force in South Vietnam, and continuing the mining of the harbors of North Vietnam. Only by having that kind of activity go

*see note, p. 2

forward will they have any incentive to return our POWs, rather than not to account for them, as was the case when the French got out of Vietnam in 1954 - and 15,000 French** were never accounted for after that. I shall never let that happen to the brave men who are POWs.

[End of answer to question.]

* Interesting slip in date given in fifth paragraph of answer, "April 13th, Thursday."
See chronology of events for 12 Apr, 14 Apr - filed either in POW file or separately.

** From transcription, KPFA News 30 Jun 72, this file: "The State Department said later today that the 15,000 French prisoners of war Nixon referred to were actually Indochinese who held French citizenship."

See Letters to Editor, NYTimes 12, 21 Sep 72.