

Nixon news conference, Q & A on Settlement in Vietnam:

(NIX AD)

3. Settlement in Vietnam

Q. ... possibility of a negotiated settlement in Vietnam before the election?

A. The settlement will come just as soon as we can possibly get a settlement which is right, right for the South Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese, and for us, one that will have in mind our goals of preventing the imposition by force of a Communist government in South Vietnam and, of course, a goal that is particularly close to our hearts, in a humanitarian sense, the return of our prisoners of war.

I should emphasize, however, that under no circumstances will the timing of a settlement, for example, the possible negotiation of a cease-fire, the possible negotiation of, or unilateral action with regard to a bombing halt, under no circumstances will such action be affected by the fact that there is going to be an election November 7th.

If we can make the right kind of settlement before the election, we will make it. If we cannot, we are not going to make the wrong kind of a settlement before the election. We were around that track in 1968 when well-intentioned men made a very, very great mistake in stopping the bombing without adequate agreements from the other side.

I do not criticize them for that, of course, as far as their motives are concerned. I simply said, having seen what happened then, we are not going to make that mistake now.

The election, I repeat, will not in any way influence what we do at the negotiating table.

Secondly, because I know this subject has been discussed by a number of you, as it should be, in your commentaries and in your reports, the negotiations at this time, as you know, have been in the private channel, very extensive. We have agreed that neither side will discuss the content of those negotiations. I will not discuss them one way or another.

I will only say that the negotiations are in a sensitive stage. I cannot predict and will not predict that they will or will not succeed. I cannot and will not predict when they will succeed.

But I will say that any comment on my part with regard to how the negotiations are going could only have a detrimental effect on the goal that we are seeking, and that is as early as possible a negotiated settlement of this long and difficult war.

4. Delay by Hanoi

Q. Mr. President, it has been said that Hanoi may be waiting until after the election to make a settlement on the theory that if they got a Democrat elected they would get better terms for them. How do you answer that?

A. They could be motivated by that. There are those who believe that they

were motivated to an extent in 1968 by political considerations in agreeing to a bombing halt before the election with the thought that defeating me was more in their interest than electing my opponent.

I do not claim that that was the case. I must say that both Senator Humphrey and I, I think, were quite responsible in that election campaign in refusing to comment on what were then only preliminary negotiations, recognizing that any comment by one who might be President might jeopardize the success of the negotiations.

Now, as far as Hanoi's putting their eggs in that basket, that only indicates that the American political scene is one that no one can predict. Despite what the polls say, and despite some indications on our side that we

have a good chance of winning, there are many in the country and there are those who think that there is a possibility the other side might win.

Under no circumstances, however, will we ever be influenced by the election. We would never be influenced by the election directly or indirectly. We would never be influenced by the election in South Vietnam. We would never be influenced by the election in our starting point. We would never be influenced by the election in our strategy.

On the other hand, we would never be influenced by the election. If we have a Democrat elected, we will continue to negotiate. If we have a Republican elected, we will continue to negotiate. We will try to get them to start negotiating until after the elections, but good strategy.