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PRESIDENT SAYS 'OPINION LEADERS' FAILED HIM ON WAR

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Holds Media, Business and
University Critics Should
Have Supported Mining

NYTimes

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 16—

President Nixon attacked today "the so-called opinion leaders of this country" for not supporting him last May after he ordered the bombing of North Vietnam and the mining of its ports to deter the "specter of defeat."

Speaking extemporaneously and emotionally during a brief surprise appearance* at a conference here of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, the President delivered a slashing indictment of critics of his Vietnam policies. He included critics in the news media, the universities and even the business community.

Pledging that the fate of the prisoners of war would not be left "to the goodwill of the enemy" and that draft evaders and deserters "will pay a price for their choice," Mr. Nixon addressed himself to key points in last Tuesday's Vietnam policy speech by his Democratic opponent, Senator George McGovern.

McGovern's Promise

Senator McGovern promised that, if elected, he would send Sargent Shriver, his Vice-Presidential nominee, to Hanoi "to speed the arrangements" for

the prisoners' return and would grant jailed and exiled draft evaders and deserters "the opportunity to come home."

The central theme of Mr. Nixon's eight-minute speech to the conference of families of prisoners of war was a denunciation of critics.

Mr. Nixon, who received a standing ovation from the audience of about 1,000 persons at the Statler Hilton Hotel, told the conference that his move last May 8 to interdict North Vietnamese supply lines was "the hardest decision I have made since becoming President of the United States."

He explained that as he was preparing for his Moscow meeting with Soviet leaders, "a massive Communist invasion took place in South Vietnam from North Vietnam."

'Had to Make a Choice'

"We were faced with the specter of defeat," the President said. "And I had to make a choice, a choice of accepting that defeat and going to Moscow hat in hand, or of acting to prevent it. I acted."

Mr. Nixon said that the decision was militarily "right" and that "those who predicted that it would lead to the dissolution of the summit and its

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failure proved to be wrong."

He then asserted that when a President makes "a hard decision, the so-called opinion leaders of this country can be counted upon to stand beside him, regardless of party."

He asked: "Who are the opinion leaders?"

"Well, they are supposed to be the leaders of the media, the great editors and publishers and television commentators and the rest.

"They are supposed to be the presidents of our universities and the professors and the rest, those who have the educational background to understand the importance of great decisions and the neces-

sity to stand by the President of the United States when he makes a terribly difficult, potentially unpopular decision. They are supposed to be some of our top businessmen who also have this kind of background.

"Let me tell you that when that decision was made, there was precious little support from any of the so-called opinion leaders of this country whom I have just described."

Substitute for Kissinger

Henry A. Kissinger, Mr. Nixon's special assistant for national security affairs, had been scheduled to address the conference, but the President said that "I decided to substitute" for him to thank the prisoners' families for their support "and to urge you for your continued support."

He said the support he sought was not for "an election campaign" but for the "cause of an honorable peace."

Mr. Nixon said that "some very intensive negotiations have been under way" but that he would not comment on their status because "I would not want to raise false hopes" and because "any comments when negotiations are taking place could jeopardize their success."

Summing up the United States negotiating position, Mr. Nixon said that he would not agree "to any settlement which imposes a Communist government upon the people of South Vietnam," would "under no circumstances abandon our prisoners of war and our missing in action" and would "not betray our allies."

Peril to Honor Seen

"We shall not stain the honor of the United States," he said.

Mr. Nixon said that when he used the word "abandon," he spoke "quite deliberately" to say that "we cannot leave their fate to the goodwill of the enemy."

Senator McGovern has said that he would send Mr. Shriver to Hanoi soon after halting the bombing of North Vietnam, would end all support for the South Vietnamese government and would arrange for the prisoners' return.

The Nixon Administration has maintained that the release of the prisoners must be "in

parallel" with the withdrawal of United States troops from Vietnam and must not be left for subsequent disposition.

Although Senator McGovern did not use the word "amnesty" when he said last week that deserters and draft evaders should have the opportunity to come home," the President said:

"I say that when thousands of Americans died for their choice and hundreds are now P.O.W.'s or missing in action for their choice, it would be the most immoral thing I could think of to give amnesty to draft dodgers and those who deserted."

"Your loved ones have and are paying a price for their choice, and those who deserted America will pay a price for their choice," the President

Mr. Nixon told the prisoners' families, "I know it has been a long, long vigil for you," but "you have never been away from my thoughts and you have never been away from my prayers, and there is nothing that I want more than to bring your loved ones home, and I will never let you down."

In a television interview on the Columbia Broadcasting System last Jan. 2, Mr. Nixon said: "I, for one, would be very liberal with regard to amnesty, but not while there are Americans in Vietnam fighting to serve their country and defend their country, and not while P.O.W.'s are held by North Vietnam."

The President said in January that amnesty would be considered after the end of the fighting and the release of the prisoners "but it would have to be on a basis of their paying the price, of course, that anyone should pay for violating the law."

* According to Washington Post, in SFChronicle 17 Oct, "The decision was made so hastily that normal Secret Service advance work had not been done."



Associated Press

Mrs. Wesley Ratzel of Scranton, Pa., the mother of Lieut. Wesley D. Ratzel of the Air Force, missing in action in Vietnam since May, talking to President Nixon during the conference on prisoners of war yesterday in Washington.

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