

Excerpts From President Nixon's

Following are excerpts from President Nixon's address to the convention of Veterans of Foreign Wars in New Orleans yesterday, as recorded by The New York Times, through the facilities of A.B.C. News:

I've spoken to the Veterans of Foreign Wars on several occasions since I've been President, and I am proud that this is the first time I've been President, and I am proud that this is the first spoken to you when the United States is at peace with every nation in the world. It's a good time, a good time.

And it's rather an ironic time for those who follow the Washington scene, as some of you must. We find that some of the politicians and some of the members of the press, who enthusiastically supported the Administration which got us into Vietnam 10 years ago, or were silent when the decisions were made that got us in, now are criticizing what I did to get us out. Well, let me say getting us out of the war took a lot of doing, and I am proud of what we've done, and I'd like to talk to you about that today, just how we accomplished that goal.

Because you see, my friends, I think the time has come before this organization to answer those who criticize the policy which helped to bring Americans peace with honor in Vietnam.

Now specifically, as some of you know, the President of the United States has been accused of a secret bombing campaign against the defenseless and neutral country of Cambodia in 1969. That was two months after I became President.

And I want to tell you the facts about that, what happened, and let you judge for yourself what kind of a decision you would have made as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the United States at that time.

Meeting With Aides Recalled

I remember the meeting in which that decision was made. Mr. Laird, who was Secretary of Defense, remembers it. He was there. Henry Kissinger, to whom you will give an award tonight, remembers it. He was there. The chairman of the C.I.A. was there, the Secretary of State, Secretary Rogers, was there. And we looked over what was to us a totally indefensible position.

Here is what we found when I came into office.

Three hundred Americans were being killed every week in Vietnam; 540,000 Americans were in Vietnam with no plan at all to bring any of them home; over 500 were prisoners of war under the most cruel and barbarous condition, and no plans and no hope for any of them to be returned home.

That was what we found. And so we decided to do something about it. And incidentally, in pointing out what we found, I'm not criticizing

previous Presidents; I'm not criticizing the decisions that they felt were their national interests that had to be made, they felt, in Vietnam. I'm simply saying this is what we found and we had to find a way to bring the war to a conclusion, but to bring it to a conclusion in a way that the United States would still be respected in the world.

And that meant rejecting the views of those who said, "Just bug out." We could have bugged out of Vietnam. If we bugged out of Vietnam, we wouldn't be worth talking to any place in the world today. We've got to maintain the respect of America throughout the world.

The Cambodian Situation

Now we come to Cambodia.

All of you, particularly the young people here who study the maps of these areas, know of this country right on the border of Vietnam.

When I took office—again 1969—at this meeting that took place, we found that there was a strip of land 10 to 15 miles wide in which there were no Cambodians whatever. It was totally occupied by the enemy—the North Vietnamese.

They had overrun the entire border area. The native Cambodian population had been evacuated, or driven out. And along a 10-mile stretch on the Cambodian side of the border—sometimes 15—a network of supply lines and training bases had been established and the bulk of some 40,000 troops were there. That's what the C.I.A. report showed. That's what also the reports of our own military, as they examined the situation there, showed.

As so what we find that is the situation that we're referring to back there in 1969, so long ago when this war was at its height and we were trying to do something to bring it to an honorable end, was not the United States but the North Vietnamese Communists who violated the neutrality of Cambodia.

Now a suggestion that these staging areas for enemy troops, supplies and artillery a few thousand yards from American troops were what we call neutral territory exempt from counterattack or bombing is simply ludicrous.

No 'Moral Obligation' Seen

The Communists had made a mockery of the neutrality of these border regions. The United States was under no moral obligation to respect the sham. By January of 1969, these enemy-occupied sanctuaries were no more neutral territory than was Northern France or Belgium in the late spring of 1944 when those territories were occupied by the Germans.

And so it was in February of '69, when the North Vietnamese responded to President Johnson's three-month-old bombing halt and peace initiative with a countrywide offensive in the South in which hundreds of Americans were killed every week and thousands every month—af-

ter this meeting that I have just spoken to, I made the decision. I ordered American air power employed directly and continually against the enemy-occupied base areas from which Communist soldiers had been attacking and killing American soldiers.

And so today this great anguish and loud protests from the usual critics: How could the United States make a secret attack on tiny Cambodia?

Well, of course, this is absurd. These strikes weren't directed at the Cambodian Army or the Cambodian people. They were directed at the North Vietnamese invaders who at that time had occupied this area within Cambodia and were killing Americans from this area.

Invitation From Sihanouk

And this is the significant thing. The Cambodian Government did not object to the strikes. In fact, while they were in progress in the spring of that year, Prince Sihanouk, then the leader of the Cambodian Government, personally invited me very warmly to make a state visit to the Cambodian capital. This is after the strikes had been going on for a long time. That's a pretty good indication of what he thought about what we were doing.

Now as for secrecy; as I've already indicated, the fact of the bombing was disclosed to appropriate Government leaders, the ones I've just referred to, and to appropriate Congressional leaders, those in the military affairs committee like Eddie Hébert.

What is most important, and here is the bottom line, soon after this bombing started early in this Administration, there began a steady decline finally in American casualties along the Cambodian border and the enemy was provided with one more incentive to move to the conference table, which they began to do.

The secrecy was necessary to accomplish these goals—secrecy from the standpoint of making a big public announcement about it—although there was no secrecy as far as the Government leaders were concerned who had any right to know or need to know.

Letter From a Father

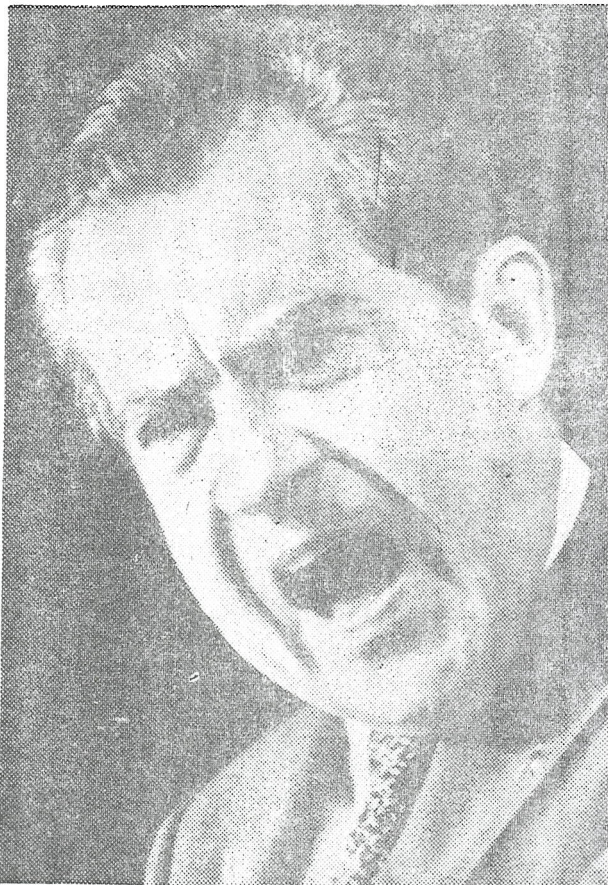
Had we announced the air strikes, the Cambodian Government would have been compelled to protest, the bombing would have had to stop and American soldiers would have paid the price for this disclosure and this announcement with their lives.

My comrades, I'll just read you a letter. A President gets a lot of very moving letters during and after any period of war.

This is from the father of a soldier who served along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border back in 1969. It says:

"Dear Mr. President: "Back in early 1969—and I had his letter he wrote me then too—"I wrote to you requesting that you allow the

Address to the Veterans



Associated Press

President Nixon addressing the convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars yesterday in New Orleans.

bombing of the supply routes in North Vietnam and Cambodia. I wrote to you because my son Douglas, who was with the Fourth Infantry Division near Kontum, complained to us in his letters about all the materials and men that the North Vietnamese were shipping in from Cambodia.

"When my son was killed in March of 1969, I felt you let him down. And I felt you let the other troops down by not allowing these supply lines to be bombed.

"And now today in 1973, I read where you did approve the bombing early in 1969 and I now believe the Lord led you to make a proper decision in this matter. I sincerely feel your actions saved many lives and shortened that dreadful war."

Just let me add a postscript to that letter.

If American soldiers in the field today were similarly threatened by an enemy and if the price of protecting those soldiers was to order air strikes to save American lives, I would make the same decision today that I made in February, 1969.

Mining of Haiphong Recalled

Of course, we have had other complaints too. The post-mortems on what happened. You remember the huge outcry when I ordered the mining of Haiphong in May of 1972—it was going to bring on World War III. We did it. What it brought on was the negotiation that helped to finally end the war.

And you remember in Christmas of last year—and this was a terribly difficult decision—Dec. 18, and I ordered the use of B-52's against Hanoi, military tar-

gets only. Those were the targets. And there was a great outcry then that this was a wrong decision on the part of the President. And I don't say that all the decisions are right. But just let me say this.

When I wondered about those decisions and I wonder what was wrong and what was right, I recall a very young man—to me he seemed very young—who came through a receiving line in May at a reception we gave for 600 P.O.W.'s after they had returned.

The line moved rather fast and there wasn't much time to say much to any one of them and this one man said—young man said, "I'd like to ask you a question, sir," and I said, "Sure, go ahead." He said, "why did you wait so long to order in the B-52's?"

Decisions Defended

And all that I can say is this: that if it was that decision or any other one, the decisions were made in the interests of bringing this war to an honorable conclusion as quickly as possible using the force that was necessary and no more than was necessary.

And I say further that no future American President should ever send Americans into battle with one hand tied behind their back.

But we've been talking about war. Let me turn from war to peace.

Let me turn to it in a way that may be of great interest to you, particularly again to those of you, the young people who still read history and perhaps remember it or read it many years ago but find it more difficult to remember as time goes on.

But you all remember Waterloo, and you all remember of course, the great hero of Waterloo on the British, the allied side—the Duke of Wellington.

And people think of him only as a man of war. Of course he had basically two careers—he was a great general and then, after that, served as Prime Minister for many, many years in Britain in the early 19th century.

But in reading the biography of Wellington, it's interesting to note—and this is something that I know that every person in this room will agree—that after every battle—battles which he won, he didn't lose any—he had a feeling of depression.

And the depression was because he had seen brave men die, on both sides. And whether it was the battles in India that he won, or the Peninsula War, the Lowland, or Waterloo, there was always this feeling.

Words After Waterloo

But it was in Waterloo, after Waterloo only, that immortal words were spoken by Wellington that I know will mean something to each one of us here, as you give the President of the United States—and I accept it as President for all Presidents who work for peace, because everyone wants peace—after the Battle of Waterloo, and as Wellington looked over that field of battle and he saw the brave British soldiers and the Prussian soldiers, and Blücher's army and Napoleon's soldiers lying there in the field, he said: "There's only one thing worse than losing a battle, and that is winning a battle."

Think about that a moment. What he is really saying is that war is an answer to no problems, and winning a war—even in that time when war would not have destroyed civilization—left the winner feeling that there's only one thing worse than losing a war, and that is winning it.

What I am saying here today to you is that, as we finish the longest war in America's history, with honor, as we look to the future, I want to pledge to the Veterans of Foreign Wars and to the American people that I am going to continue to work to build a lasting peace so that our children will not have the legacy that we had, a war every generation in this century. World War I, World War II, Korea, then Vietnam. That's enough.

Steps Taken for Peace

What we have to do is to build a structure of peace for the whole world. I know that the big news as far as 1972 is concerned, and what immediately followed in January, was the ending of the war in Vietnam. But other news was being made which is even more important in determining the future of this nation for years and years to come—and the future of peace in the world.

There was the first trip of a President of the United States to Moscow. There was,

of Foreign Wars

at the occasion of that trip, the negotiation of many agreements, but a nuclear arms control agreement, and then another one this year. The beginning of a long process of negotiation rather than confrontation between two superpowers, each of which has the total strength within itself to destroy the other, but will not do so without recognizing that to make that decision is a decision for national suicide. That's what war has become.

There was also looking to the future last year another trip, a trip to Peking. The first time a President has gone there. And as we look at Peking and we think of the fact that 25 years from now, when these young people sitting here will be as old as we are—25 years from now one billion of the ablest people in the world are going to be living there.

And because they are able, they will be a superpower if they want to be, militarily and economically. It is essential that the steps be taken now to see to it that we build the structure of peace where the United States will not be in confrontation with the Soviet Union or with the Peoples Republic of China.

Relations With Europe Cited

And then there are other parts of this great, great spectrum that a President must think of. This is a year in which we are working with our European allies, and our friends around the world, because remember that you don't win new friends by betraying old friends. Because new friends aren't going to trust you if you betray your old friends.

And so the United States is maintaining its alliances; we're shoring them up at the same time that we're negotiating with those who are the potential adversaries, or were our potential adversaries a short time ago.

Peace—not just in the sense of ending a long and difficult war, but peace in the sense of a whole open world where people with different philosophies can live together, discuss, negotiate, argue, but not engage in war, which would be totally destructive of civilization as we know it at this point. That is our goal.

Now one final point I make is this: If that kind of peace is to be attained, it will only be attained if the United States plays the major role from the standpoint of a free nation. Because there's no one else to do it. The Europeans can't do it, they don't have the strength. And there's no nation in Asia or Africa or Latin America that has the strength to play that role.

'Strength Second to None'

And so, if we're going to be able to negotiate this era of peace, we have to have a United States that has a military strength second to none. We have to have a United States that is respected around the world, respected because we stand by our commitments. And we have

to have a United States that has the character and the vision to play this great role, and play it for many years to come.

And that is not easy. My friends in the House and the Senate will tell you today that many of their colleagues—good and decent men, but I think mistaken men and women—are calling for huge cuts in our defense budget, withdrawal of our forces from Europe, regardless of what the other side does, cutting back on our nuclear capability, regardless of what the Soviet Union does.

My friends, let me tell you what would happen. Right now we're negotiating with the Soviet Union, for example, to limit nuclear arms. We are going to have—and, as a matter of fact, the negotiations begin in October, the latter part—we're negotiating for a reduction of forces in Europe.

But unless, in a negotiation, you have something to give, you're not going to get anything. And so I say, let the people of the United States not listen to the unilateral disarmers that would make the United States the second strongest nation in the world.

I pledge to you our power will never be used in aggression, it will be used only to serve the cause of peace and the cause of freedom. As far as our strength is concerned, we will be willing to negotiate. And we can negotiate a reduction of the limitation of arms.

Exhortation to America

But, my friends, the hope of the world for peace, the hope of 200 million Americans and three billion people in this world, it rests in America, a strong America. Strong in its military defenses, but also strong in its vision and its will to act like a great nation in a period when we are very tired of the burdens we've carried abroad—particularly after Vietnam and Korea.

I can only say the stakes are high. We could cop out, as many suggest in the House and the Senate and in the press—many, not all. We could cop out from our responsibilities in the world, we could cut back our forces, we could quit playing a great role in the world. But if we do, then our children will live in a very dangerous world, and no future President will have much of a chance to get a peace award.

And so I say to my friends here in this audience, all of you—whether members of our organization or guests—that I proudly accept the peace award. I hope that I personally can be worthy of it, but more important, I hope and I pray that America can be worthy of it. That in these years ahead, a strong America and a strong people will lead us even into a century of peace beyond that time. It can be done. That is our goal with your help, believe me, we will reach that goal.

Thank you.