

The President's CopyTOP SECRET/SENSITIVE4th Draft
October 2, 1969DRAFT OF A PRESIDENTIAL SPEECH

My fellow Americans,

It is my duty to tell you tonight of a major decision in our quest for an honorable peace in Vietnam.

I want to begin with a few words about the meaning of negotiation.

Negotiation, as we understand it -- and as almost everyone in the world understands it -- is a process in which two sides seek to resolve a conflict by considering concrete proposals on their merits, by bargaining, by give-and-take, by compromise. Negotiation is a two-way street. Both sides must be willing to engage seriously in this process, in good faith. Or there can be no settlement.

There can be no settlement when only one side makes an honest effort to put forward reasonable compromise terms. There can be no settlement when the other side arrogantly declaims to the gallery and demands capitulation.

Almost exactly one year ago, the United States halted all bombing of North Vietnam on the understanding that "prompt, productive, serious and intensive negotiations" would follow.

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Our Government was led to believe that the bombing itself was the major obstacle to peace. The United States was told this repeatedly by many, both at home and abroad. President Johnson courageously took the risk of removing that so-called obstacle. I supported his decision.

But I must tell you tonight that it is the sober and considered judgment of this Government that the genuine negotiations we expected have not yet taken place.

And I would remind you: This is after one long year -- a year of still more bloodshed and suffering in South Vietnam.

When I assumed the Presidency, I found that the other side had met the U.S. concession of a bombing halt with continued ferocity on the battlefield and sterile posturing in Paris.

Nonetheless, I resolved to take still more new initiatives for peace through patient and flexible diplomacy. This Administration has altered our negotiating position significantly in the direction of compromise and conciliation.

-- We did not insist that the other side stop doing what it was doing before the United States moved in the direction of settlement.

-- We did not insist that the other side declare in advance what they would do before the United States began the

process of de-escalation through withdrawal of combat forces.

Indeed, we took the very course of action which was urged upon us by so many critics. We seized the initiative for peace, trusting -- as we were assured we could -- that the other side was willing to respond and follow suit.

-- Nor did we even insist that the other side acknowledge that it was following suit. For, as you know, North Vietnam has never admitted what is known to all the world -- that troops of the North Vietnamese Army have been fighting in South Vietnam for years.

-- We have asked only that mutual de-escalation and mutual withdrawal take place in fact. That the Paris peace talks move as rapidly as possible toward a settlement through genuine negotiation.

Thus we did not seek to humiliate our foe. Indeed, we went further by offering bold new proposals designed to engage him in honorable compromise.

-- This Administration offered -- as a major step toward peace -- to negotiate the details of a mutual withdrawal

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over a period of twelve months, provided only that some safeguard in the form of international supervision is part of the agreement.

- We have proposed -- again in a major new initiative -- that free elections take place in South Vietnam, and pledged to accept their outcome, whatever it might be. We accepted National Liberation Front participation in those elections, as well as a role in organizing them.
- We proposed an international supervisory body for overseeing such elections and verifying withdrawals. We also said such a body could help arrange a supervised cease-fire.
- Moreover, we told the other side clearly that we would entertain any alternative proposals they might have for self-determination in South Vietnam.

As the most concrete demonstration of our good faith and desire to reach a settlement, this Administration began the withdrawal of American combat forces. Where the previous four years had seen only the continued buildup of American forces in Vietnam, reaching a ceiling of 549,500 men, it was this Administration that started the process of withdrawal. The ceiling is now down to 484,000. By December 15, we will have withdrawn at least 60,000 men. Some

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have argued that this number is insignificant. I ask them if they would consider the same number to be insignificant if it counted men being added rather than withdrawn.

I can reveal now what Hanoi was clearly able to observe -- that several months ago I changed General Abrams' orders to modify the strategy and tactics of our forces remaining on the battlefields of South Vietnam, in order to cut back offensive operations and thereby reduce the intensity of the fighting and the scale of casualties on both sides.

Our B-52 operations have been reduced by about 20 per cent. And, since their high point early this year, our tactical air missions have been cut by about 25 per cent.

Thus, by both word and deed, we have explicitly ruled out attempting to impose a purely military solution.

We have also announced the withdrawal by next summer of 6,000 U.S. fighting men from Thailand.

With resultant reductions in the overall level of U.S. armed forces, we have accordingly reduced our military draft.

These were all major new steps which clearly demonstrated our readiness to end this war on reasonable terms.

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We are ready to continue the process of diplomatic compromise and military de-escalation, if only the other side acts in good faith.

Yet, in taking these initiatives for peace, my fellow citizens, I realized there was the danger that Hanoi -- in the grip of a distorted perception of the United States -- would tragically misunderstand our policy.

- That they would see our will to peace as weakness.
- That they would see our hopeful de-escalation as headlong retreat.
- That they would judge us willing to endure both indifference in Paris and mounting savagery on the battlefield.
- That they would suspect our public resolve for peace disguised a private resignation to surrender.
- That they would believe, most wrongly, that the American people lacked the will to call them to account for their cynical refusal to compromise.

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-- That they would believe that their fanaticism would outlast what they saw as our national fatigue.

I decided shortly after taking office that we had to do all we could possibly do to bring an honorable peace to Vietnam. At the same time, I repeatedly warned Hanoi that they should not mistake our purpose or abuse our patience.

In my address to you on May 14, I said, "But no greater mistake could be made than to confuse flexibility with weakness or of being reasonable with lack of resolution. I must also make clear, in all candor, that if needless suffering continues, this will affect other decisions. Nobody has anything to gain by delay." These words were not said lightly.

This warning was privately confirmed to Hanoi's chief negotiator in Paris at the beginning of August. He was informed that if no major progress toward a settlement of the war had been made by the first of November, we would be compelled to take measures of the greatest consequence.

But tonight -- after months of the most thorough study and deliberation -- I must report to you that Hanoi has indeed made a tragic miscalculation of our will and purpose. They have not heeded

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our clear warnings. They have refused to credit the word of the United States.

- Denouncing our every initiative as a fraud, they have treated negotiations as a forum for U.S. capitulation.
- Judging the U.S. position untenable, they have stubbornly refused to alter their own.
- Believing victory over freedom inevitable, they have seen no need for compromise.

I must tell you that their only answer to our many offers has been a monotonous demand for our own humiliation and the destruction of the South Vietnamese Government.

They have laughed in private meetings at our negotiators' frustration. And they have responded to our words of moderation with vituperative insult. In my speech at the United Nations on September 18 I said, "When the war ends, we stand willing to help the people of Vietnam -- all of them -- in their tasks of renewal and reconstruction." I also said that "the people of Vietnam, North and South, have endured an unspeakable weight of suffering for a generation. And they deserve a better future." Hanoi's response to these words was only name

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calling. Radio broadcasts referred to a "bellicose, brutal and cunning imperialist," to our nation's "bellicose acts and colonialist policy."

These are the words only of blind and reckless hostility.

The record here is unmistakable. Within a few days, the U.S. Government will publish the complete documentary record -- public and private -- of our search for peace in the face of the unmitigated intransigence of North Vietnam. The world can judge for itself who has prolonged this tragic war.

This record will show, in addition to our warning at the beginning of August, a series of very private efforts we have made to find a reasonable settlement.

- Before the inauguration in January, I made a private offer of a rapid settlement of all the issues involved. This was rejected.
- In April, the Soviet Union's Ambassador here in Washington was given a proposal of direct and rapid talks on all questions, specifically including political issues. No reply was received.
- In May, I personally repeated this proposal to the Ambassador. Again, there has been no reply.

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- In June, we attempted to send an emissary to Hanoi to offer direct negotiations on all the issues involved. After arriving in Laos, he was refused a visa for entrance into North Vietnam, although he had been led to believe that he would be received in Hanoi. He left a message with the North Vietnamese Ambassador in Laos. There has been no reply.
- At the end of June, we offered to send another emissary to Hanoi to establish direct talks. He also was refused entry.
- On August 4, my Assistant for National Security Affairs held a secret meeting with Hanoi's chief negotiator in Paris. He emphasized our flexibility and desire to achieve a reasonable compromise. In addition to reviewing our previous offers, he made several points clear:
 - . We realized, he said, that neither side could be expected to give up at the conference table what had not been conceded on the battlefield, and that a fair political process must register the existing relationship of political forces.
 - . We knew that we differed from them on how to achieve this, but we also believed that neither side should be

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asked to accept the proposition that there is such a thing as a disguised defeat.

We were not asking them to disband their organized political forces and they should not ask for the destruction of the organized non-Communist political forces.

Finally, he said that in order to demonstrate our good will in the period between then and November 1st, we would make another withdrawal of American troops and reduce our B-52 and tactical air operations by 10 per cent.

There has been no direct response to that conversation.

This record confronts the United States with fateful but clearcut choices.

We can go on, as some suggest, in one-sided unrequited concessions. We can slowly withdraw our forces despite the proven intransigence of the enemy. But let no one call this the way to peace.

-- For we must face the cruel fact the enemy has it in his power to continue killing too many American men, and is doing so.

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- I therefore cannot take the responsibility for basing our policy on the continued withdrawal of American troops, under these conditions, exposing those remaining to ever greater risks at the hands of an enemy who shows no will to peace.
- While Hanoi may be willing to condemn its sons to endless bloodletting, I will not do so with ours.
- We insist on a fair settlement now.

Or, some argue that this slaughter could be ended by precipitate withdrawal.

But let no one call this the way to peace. Let no one believe that a forced and hasty retreat by the U.S. will somehow end the killing in South Vietnam.

- Just the opposite. For South Vietnam, a nation still struggling toward adequate self-defense, the sudden withdrawal of our support would inevitably invite the cruel retribution of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong.
- Here, too, the calculus is plain. Terror and barbarism have plagued the villages of Vietnam for a decade. With

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a sudden collapse of our vital support, the massacres at Hue and the recurrent atrocities in the contested countryside could well become the nightmare of the entire nation.

-- Though we had made a commitment to free choice and started South Vietnam to self-sufficiency in defense, this course would leave the issue once more to untold violence.

-- Nor would the South Vietnamese bear alone the consequences of our rapid retreat. We, too, would pay a bitter price: in dangerous vindication of those among our enemies who advocate violence, in the collapse of our friends' confidence in America and, most of all, in the loss of America's confidence in herself.

I cannot choose either of these courses. I was not elected to preside over the senseless attrition of American lives by a deluded foe. To abandon trusting friends to a long night of terror. To shatter our integrity as a nation.

Thus, our course is clear.

Continued bloodshed on the battlefield and Hanoi's rigidity at the peace table have taught us there is but one other choice.

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Hanoi and her allies have long believed that this nation would accept a humiliating defeat, that our Government would have no alternative but to submit to the surrender demanded of us in Paris.

Hanoi has misjudged the strength of the American people. Our enemies have mistaken debate for defeatism.

After difficult and careful consideration, I have decided that we have no choice but to prove to Hanoi that we mean to have an honorable peace in Vietnam.

That decision had to be my responsibility. It is our common responsibility -- yours and mine -- to demonstrate our unflinching resolve to end this war now.

Today, pursuant to my order

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I want to make several points quite clear:

- First, our political objective is precise. We seek to prove to the leaders of North Vietnam that they have no alternative but prompt and genuine negotiations to settle this conflict. We take this action not to interrupt the process of negotiation, but to see it begin at last. Not to make new demands, but to find an honest compromise. We retain our flexible and conciliatory stand in Paris, ready to respond to any reasonable proposal by the other side. Naturally, we pray that their response comes soon, for the sake of their own people.

- Second, our military action has been measured. It will be swift, punishing and concentrated in a short period of time. We are not resuming the daily bombing of limited targets in North Vietnam. When our action is completed, in a few days, Hanoi will have an interval in which to respond by demonstrating a will to peaceful and productive negotiation.

- Third, our aims are limited. We do not require the destruction or surrender of North Vietnam. We do seek

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reasonable compromise at the peace table. But Hanoi must now make this choice.

- We seek no expansion of the conflict. We seek its end. We covet no territory in Southeast Asia. We seek no confrontation with the Soviet Union or China. Our actions are directed against North Vietnam, and North Vietnam alone. But we will take steps within those limits to make our action effective. And the fateful choice of outside powers to involve themselves in this action will be theirs.

I accompany our action today with a call for renewed effort in every quarter to halt this war.

- I call upon the leaders of North Vietnam to understand finally that a just and mutually-agreed settlement is the only way to bring peace, true independence, and an eventual reconciliation to both North and South Vietnam. Their brave people have already suffered too much for the twisted dream of conquest in the South. Continued intransigence by their leaders will only compound their agony.

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-- I call once again upon the Soviet Union -- in its own interest -- to use its influence with Hanoi to bring an end to this war. If the leaders of the Soviet Union truly desire an era of negotiation rather than confrontation, let them at last begin with Vietnam. But let them also know that we will not be deflected from our course.

-- I say to our friends in South Vietnam that our resolve to find an honorable settlement is stronger than ever before. Let us fortify our firmness in battle with a new spirit of compromise when genuine talks begin.

-- And finally, I ask you, My fellow Americans, for the same strong support you have always given your President in a moment of trial.

For at this moment, we can only stand together in purpose and determination.

As so often in the past, we Americans did not choose this test of strength. It was clearly forced upon us by an adversary, indifferent to our peaceful purpose and heedless of our resolve.

Let there be no mistake that we have any other choice.

We must face the fact that doubt and debate now can only mislead our enemy and prolong the bloodshed.

This has been at once, my fellow Americans, a most difficult yet most inescapable decision.

For that very reason, it is irreversible.

We cannot have the peace we cherish unless we act to secure it -- and act together.

Tonight, that fact is as plain as ever before in our history.

Our road ahead is clear, and there is no turning back. I know that if we travel it together, as we must, we will end this bitter war.

