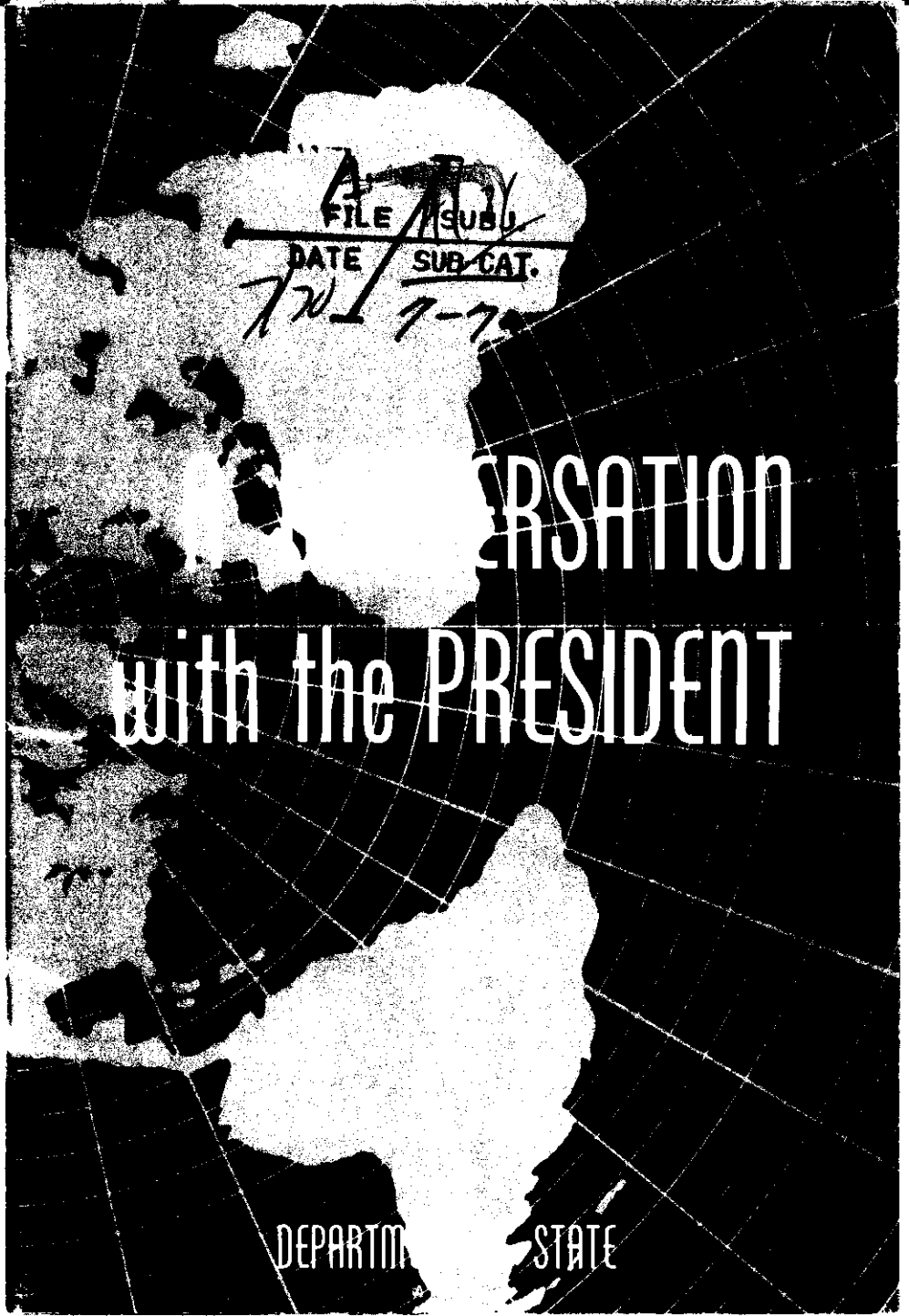
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A CONVERSATION with the PRESIDENT

This pamphlet is a transcript of a television interview in which President Richard Nixon discussed U.S. foreign policy with representatives of the three major television networks: John Chancellor, NBC News; Eric Sevareid, CBS News; Howard K. Smith, ABC News. The interview was televised live from Los Angeles, Calif., on July 1, 1970.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE PUBLICATION 8545

General Foreign Policy Series 248

Released July 1970

Office of Media Services

BUREAU OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. – Price 30 cents

A CONVERSATION WITH THE PRESIDENT

The President: Good evening. Before turning to our panel for their questions, I have a brief announcement.

After consultation with the Secretary of State and other senior advisers, I decided to name Ambassador David Bruce as chief of our delegation to the Paris talks.

Ambassador Bruce, as all of those who have studied our foreign policy know, is one of America's most distinguished diplomats. He is a Democrat, but he has served five Presidents, Democrat and Republican, with great devotion and great ability. He is the only Ambassador in our history who has been Ambassador to Germany, Ambassador to England, and Ambassador to France.

He will meet me in San Clemente along with Ambassador Habib, who is chief of our delegation, acting at this time, and the Under Secretary of State, Alexis Johnson, on Saturday, July 4.

There, along with Dr. Kissinger [Henry A. Kissinger, Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs], we will discuss the situation with regard to the talks as they presently exist. Then on July 11 he will meet with Secretary of State Rogers in

London, as Secretary Rogers completes his Asian trip and will stop briefly in Britain on his way back to the United States.

Ambassador Bruce will have the opportunity then to meet with the National Security Council in the middle of this month, perhaps about the 15th of July, and is arranging his affairs so that he will be able to go to Paris and take over as chief of the delegation on the 1st of August or shortly before that time.

We believe that in appointing Ambassador Bruce we have selected a man who is superbly qualified to conduct these negotiations. He will have great flexibility in the conduct of his talks. We hope that this move on our part will be reciprocated by a similar move on the part of the North Vietnamese in attempting to find a peaceful solution to the war in Viet-Nam.

Now, with that brief announcement we will go to the questions.

U.S. Negotiating Position

Mr. Smith: Mr. President, in your report on the Cambodian operation yesterday, you said you were going to emphasize the route of negotiated settlement again, and I gather this is the first step.

About other steps, have you had any signal from Hanoi that they are more willing to talk than they have been in the past, and do you have any new proposals to put to them to make a negotiated settlement more attractive?

The President: We have had no signals from Hanoi directly or indirectly that their position of intransigence has changed. They still insist that their condition for a

negotiated settlement is complete withdrawal of our forces and the throwing out of the government in South Viet-Nam as we leave.

On the other hand, we believe that they will be interested in the fact that we are appointing a new chief of delegation, because on several occasions—not particularly from them, but from third parties who have talked to them—they have indicated that they felt that we should appoint a new chief of delegation. We have now appointed one, and we hope that they act.

As far as new proposals are concerned, I think it is important for us to know what our proposals are because we have made some very forthcoming proposals.

First, we have offered to withdraw all of our forces if they withdraw theirs and to have that withdrawal internationally supervised.

Second, we have offered to have cease-fires throughout the country and have those cease-fires again internationally supervised.

Third, and most important, we have offered to have free elections throughout the country, internationally supervised. We have offered to have the supervisory bodies be ones in which the Communists can participate as well as those representing the present government in South Viet-Nam; and we have offered on our part, and the South Vietnamese Government has offered on its part, to accept the results of that election, even though those results might include Communists in some positions or Communists in some power.

We believe that these offers are very forthcoming, and I should also say that in private channels we have elaborated on these offers.

Finally, I should also point out that we have not made our proposals on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. Ambassador Bruce will be in that position—he will be in a position with his new instructions to tell the opposition that we have laid these proposals out, we believe they are the formula that should provide the basis for a negotiated peace, but that we are willing to see whether we can narrow the gap between their position and ours.

There is only one matter that is not subject to negotiation, and that is the right of the South Vietnamese to determine their own future.

That is one of the reasons, for example, that the speculation with regard to our having changed our position and agreeing possibly to now offer a coalition government, a negotiated settlement imposing a coalition government, that speculation is not correct.

It is not correct, because if we were to negotiate with the North Vietnamese and decide that we would have a coalition government and impose it on the South Vietnamese, that is a government without their choice.

If the South Vietnamese, on the other hand, in the free political process should choose Communists as well as non-Communists and out of that should come a government that is mixed, that is up to them.

But we will not impose a coalition government against the will, and without the consent, of the people of South Viet-Nam. But except for those two conditions, Ambassador Bruce will be free to negotiate in a very flexible manner on our proposals or on theirs.

Purpose of Interview

Mr. Chancellor: Mr. President, we are all pleased to be here with you tonight. As you know, the networks

have standing requests for interviews of this kind with you. I would like to know why you have chosen this technique at this particular time.

The President: We have, as you know, Mr. Chancellor, numbers of requests to do everything from press conferences to individual interviews and the like. I noted, of course, that in the previous administrations this technique was used first by President Kennedy, and I thought very effectively, you remember, after his first year in office. President Johnson used it twice, and I thought also in a very interesting and effective way.

I have not yet used this technique. It seemed to me that this would be useful now, and incidentally, it is useful for another reason. I have followed some of what has been referred to as the instant commentary, and I do know—after my press conferences—and I do know that one of the difficulties with press conferences—and some of you have been very kind in referring to the style of the conferences, not always to the replies—but one of the difficulties is that an individual does not get to follow up a question.

Now, this allows that. So, by taking the subject of foreign policy, by picking the anchormen of the three networks, by having a chance for a little bit longer answer and a chance to follow up, I thought we could give our television audience a chance really to get to the depths of our foreign policy thinking, which you can't do when you are up there trying to in 28 minutes answer 24 times.

Mr. Sevareid: A lot of things have been happening in the last few days and some in the United States Senate.

The President: Yes, I know.

No U.S. Troops to Cambodia

Mr. Sevareid: Do you feel that you can give categorical assurances now that we will not send ground troops back into Cambodia no matter what?

The President: Mr. Sevareid, as you recall, I indicated when this operation was begun two months ago—incidentally, it seems much longer, a lot has happened in those two months and a very great deal has been achieved, in my opinion—but I indicated then that once we had completed our task successfully of cleaning out the sanctuaries that then it would not be necessary, and I would not consider it advisable, to send American ground forces back into Cambodia.

I can say now that we have no plans to send American ground forces into Cambodia. We have no plans to send any advisers into Cambodia. We have plans only to maintain the rather limited diplomatic establishment that we have in Phnom Penh, and I see nothing that will change that at this time.

Mr. Sevareid: You can't forswear in a final way—

The President: I realize that anybody listening to an answer——

Mr. Sevareid: That is what the Senate seems to want.

The President: I think that anybody hearing the answer that I have just given would certainly get the impression—and would incidentally be justified in having the impression—that the President of the United States has no intention to send ground forces back into Cambodia, and I do not believe that there will be any necessity to do so.

When you say, can I be pinned down to say that under no circumstances would the United States ever do anything, I would not say that. But I will say that our plans do not countenance it, we do not plan on it, and under the circumstances, I believe that the success of the operation which we have undertaken, as well as what the South Vietnamese will be able to do, will make it unnecessary.

Legal Basis for Viet-Nam Action

Mr. Smith: Mr. President, one of the things that happened in the Senate last week was the rescinding of the Gulf of Tonkin resolution by the Senate. Mr. Katzenbach, in the previous administration, told the Foreign Relations Committee that resolution was tantamount to a congressional declaration of war. If it is rescinded, what legal justification do you have for continuing to fight a war that is undeclared in Viet-Nam?

The President: First, Mr. Smith, as you know, this war, while it was undeclared, was here when I became President of the United States. I do not say that critically. I am simply stating the fact that there were 549,000 Americans in Viet-Nam under attack when I became President.

The President of the United States has the constitutional right—not only the right but the responsibility—to use his powers to protect American forces when they are engaged in military actions; and under these circumstances, starting at the time I became President, I have that power and I am exercising that power.

Limited U.S. Objectives

Mr. Smith: Sir, I am not recommending this, but if you don't have a legal authority to wage a war, then

presumably you could move troops out. It would be possible to agree with the North Vietnamese. They would be delighted to have us surrender. So you could—What justification do you have for keeping troops there other than protecting the troops that are there fighting?

The President: A very significant justification. It isn't just a case of seeing that the Americans are moved out in an orderly way. If that were the case we could move them out more quickly; but it is a case of moving American forces out in a way that we can at the same time win a just peace.

Now, by winning a just peace, what I mean is not victory over North Viet-Nam—we are not asking for that—but it is simply the right of the people of South Viet-Nam to determine their own future without having us impose our will upon them, or the North Vietnamese or anybody else outside impose their will upon them.

When we look at that limited objective, I am sure some would say, "Well, is that really worth it? Is that worth the efforts of all these Americans fighting in Viet-Nam, the lives that have been lost?"

I suppose it could be said that simply saving 17 million people in South Viet-Nam from a Communist takeover isn't worth the efforts of the United States. But let's go further. If the United States, after all of this effort, if we were to withdraw immediately, as many Americans would want us to do—and it would be very easy for me to do it and simply blame it on the previous administration—but if we were to do that, I would probably survive through my term, but it would have, in my view, a catastrophic effect on this country and the cause of peace in the years ahead.

Now, I know there are those who say the domino theory is obsolete. They haven't talked to the dominoes. They should talk to the Thais, to the Malaysians, to the Singaporeans, to the Indonesians, to the Filipinos, to the Japanese, and the rest. And if the United States leaves Viet-Nam in a way that we are humiliated or defeated—not simply speaking in what is called jingoistic terms, but in very practical terms—this will be immensely discouraging to the 300 million people from Japan clear around to Thailand in free Asia; and even more important, it will be ominously encouraging to the leaders of Communist China and the Soviet Union, who are supporting the North Vietnamese. It will encourage them in their expansionist policies in other areas.

The world will be much safer in which to live.

Mr. Smith: I happen to be one of those who agrees with what you are saying, but do you have a legal justification to follow that policy once the Tonkin Gulf resolution is dead?

The President: Yes, sir, Mr. Smith, the legal justification is the one I have given, and that is the right of the President of the United States under the Constitution to protect the lives of American men. That is the legal justification. You may recall, of course, that we went through this same debate at the time of Korea. Korea was also an undeclared war; and then, of course, we justified it on the basis of a U.N. action. I believe we have a legal justification, and I intend to use it.

Self-Determination for South Viet-Nam

Mr. Sevareid: Mr. President, you have said that self-determination in South Viet-Nam is really our aim, and all we can ask for. The Vice President says a non-Communist future for Indochina, or Southeast Asia. His statement seems to enlarge the ultimate American aim considerably. Have we misunderstood you, or has he, or what is the aim?

The President: Mr. Sevareid, when the Vice President refers to a non-Communist Southeast Asia that would mean, of course, a non-Communist South Viet-Nam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. That is the area we usually think of as Southeast Asia.

This is certainly something that I think most Americans and most of those in free Asia and most of those in the free world would think would be a desirable goal.

Let me put it another way: I do not think it would be in the interest of the United States and those who want peace in the Pacific if that part of the world should become Communist, because then the peace of the world, the peace in the Pacific, would be in my opinion very greatly jeopardized if the Communists were to go through that area.

However, referring now specifically to what we are doing in Viet-Nam, our aim there is a very limited one, and it is to provide for the South Vietnamese the right of self-determination. I believe that when they exercise that right, they will choose a non-Communist government. But we are indicating—and incidentally, despite what everybody says about the present government in South Viet-Nam, its inadequacies and the rest,

we have to give them credit for the fact that they also have indicated that they will accept the result of an election, what the people choose.

Let us note the fact that the North Vietnamese are in power not as a result of an election and have refused to indicate that they will accept the result of an election in South Viet-Nam, which would seem to me to be a pretty good bargaining point on our side.

The Domino Theory and Free Choice

Mr. Chancellor: Mr. President, I am a little confused at this point because you seem in vivid terms to be describing South Viet-Nam as the first of the string of dominoes that could topple in that part of the world and turn it into a Communist part of the world, in simple terms.

Are you saying that we cannot survive, we cannot allow a regime or a government in South Viet-Nam to be constructed that would, say, lean toward the Communist bloc? What about a sort of Yugoslavia? Is there any possibility of that kind of settlement?

The President: Mr. Chancellor, it depends upon the people of South Viet-Nam. If the people of South Viet-Nam, after they see what the Viet Cong, the Communist Viet Cong, have done to the villages they have occupied, the 40,000 people that they have murdered, village chiefs and others, the atrocities of Hué—if the people of South Viet-Nam, of which 850,000 of them are Catholic refugees from North Viet-Nam after a bloodbath there when the North Vietnamese took over in North Viet-Nam—if the people of South Viet-Nam under those circumstances should choose to

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move in the direction of a Communist government, that, of course, is their right. I do not think it will happen. But I do emphasize that the American position and the position also of the present government of South Viet-Nam, it seems to me, is especially strong because we are confident enough that we say to the enemy, "All right, we'll put our case to the people and we'll accept the result." If it happens to be what you describe, a Yugoslav type of government or a mixed government, we will accept it.

Mr. Chancellor: What I am getting at, sir, is, if you say on the one hand that Viet-Nam, South Viet-Nam, is the first of the row of dominoes which we cannot allow to topple, then can you say equally, at the same time, that we will accept the judgment of the people of South Viet-Nam if they choose a Communist government?

The President: The point that you make, Mr. Chancellor, is one that we in the free world face everyplace in the world, and it is really what distinguishes us from the Communist world.

Again, I know that what is called cold-war rhetoric isn't fashionable these days and I am not engaging in it, because I am quite practical, and we must be quite practical, about the world in which we live with all the dangers that we have in the Mideast and other areas that I am sure we will be discussing later in this program.

But let us understand that we in the free world have to live or die by the proposition that the people have a right to choose.

Let it also be noted that in no country in the world today in which the Communists are in power have

they come to power as a result of the people choosing them—not in North Viet-Nam, not in North Korea, not in China, not in Russia, and not in any one of the countries of Eastern Europe, and not in Cuba. In every case, communism has come to power by other than a free election, so I think we are in a pretty safe position on this particular point.

I think you are therefore putting, and I don't say this critically, what is really a hypothetical question. It could happen, but if it does happen that way we must assume the consequences; and if the people of South Viet-Nam should choose a Communist government, then we will have to accept the consequences of what would happen as far as the domino theory in the other areas.

Views of Asian Leaders

Mr. Chancellor: In other words, live with it?

The President: We would have to live with it, and I would also suggest this: When we talk about the dominoes, I am not saying that automatically if South Viet-Nam should go the others topple one by one. I am only saying that in talking to every one of the Asian leaders—and I have talked to all of them; I have talked to Lee Kuan Yew (all of you know him, from Singapore, of course), and to the Tunku from Malaysia, the little countries, and to Soeharto from Indonesia, and of course to Thanom and Thanat Khoman, the two major leaders in Thailand—I have talked to all of these leaders, and every one of them to a man recognizes, and Sato of Japan recognizes, and of course the Koreans recognize, that if the Com-

munists succeed, not as a result of a free election—they are not thinking of that—but if they succeed as a result of exporting aggression and supporting it in toppling the government, then the message to them is, "Watch out, we might be next."

That's what it really is. So, if they come in as a result of a free election, and I don't think that is going to happen, the domino effect would not be as great.

ARVN Troops in Cambodia

Mr. Sevareid: Mr. President, what caused the change in plans about the South Vietnamese troops remaining in Cambodia? On April 30 you said they would come out about when ours came out, and they are apparently building big bases and intend to stay. What happened in the meantime to change this?

The President: When I spoke on April 30, Mr. Sevareid, I pointed out that we would be out, as you recall, and we have kept that promise, despite—there is some speculation to the effect that we would have advisers in, or this, that, and the other. All Americans are out, and answering your earlier questions, we have no plans and have no expectation that any Americans would go back in.

With regard to the South Vietnamese, I pointed out on April 30 that our air support would stop and there would be no advisers with the South Vietnamese, that any activities of the South Vietnamese after we left would have to be on their own.

Now, what they are doing in South Viet-Nam—and I checked this just before the program tonight as to the numbers, there are approximately 40,000

North Vietnamese in Cambodia at the present time; there are approximately 8,000 South Vietnamese—what they are doing is cleaning out some of the sanctuary areas that were not completed when we left.

They are not building substantial bases. What they are really doing is simply providing the basis on which they can stop the North Vietnamese from coming back into the sanctuary areas, and I think that is their responsibility and their right.

U.S. Relations With Cambodia

Mr. Sevareid: Mr. President, to what extent are we really committed to preserving this new government in Cambodia, which is a rather shaky one? What would we do, for example, if the capital city of Cambodia is in imminent danger of getting into Communist hands?

The President: It is well for us to understand exactly what our relationship to Cambodia is. Let me compare it with Thailand.

With Thailand, we have a treaty, and if Thailand comes under attack, that treaty comes into force. The same is true, of course, of Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines. Cambodia is in the same category as Indonesia. It is a neutral country. It is a nonaligned country. We have no treaty with it.

As far as Cambodia is concerned, our only commitment to Cambodia is the commitment that the United States for 190 years has had to the principle of international law that a country that chooses to be neutral should have its neutrality respected.

Now, that means that we are furnishing, as you know, small arms to them for their own defense. It means

that, in addition to that, we are trying to give them the moral support that we can. We are supporting the initiative of the 11 Asian nations who are attempting to stand with that government in its neutrality. But as far as military support, the United States moving forces into Cambodia for the purpose of helping them defend against enemy attack—that we are not required to do under treaty, and that we do not intend to do.

Cambodia Strike Decisive

Mr. Smith: Mr. President, also about Cambodia, in your last press conference, I believe you were asked what distinguished this operation from escalations that occurred in past administrations, and you said this is decisive in nature.

Now, when one thinks of a decisive military operation one thinks of things like the battle of Stalingrad or D-day. Do you think that this is really decisive for the Viet-Nam war, or does it just gain time—or what?

The President: Mr. Smith, I remember your broadcast, as a matter of fact from England as I recall, at the time of Stalingrad and D-day and the rest, and I think you will agree that as we look at it in the perspective of history, we think Stalingrad was decisive and also that D-day was decisive.

However, at the time that they occurred, immediately thereafter, we couldn't be sure. Now, looking at this particular operation, it is in my view the most decisive action in terms of damaging the enemy's ability to wage effective warfare that has occurred in this war to date.

Whether it will be as decisive as Stalingrad was or as D-day was, I am not prepared to say. Only history will tell.

I do know that any action which captures and destroys over 12 months of the enemy's small-arms ammunition supply, over 14 months of their mortars, over 4 months' supply of rice, in addition to the very considerable number of enemy personnel that were killed and captured, approximately 15,000, that that is a very effective blow.

How decisive it will be remains to be seen.

I will say it is decisive in a couple of other ways. It does make it possible for us to go ahead with assurance on our withdrawal program of 150,000 more, which will be completed during the spring of next year, and it does give us more assurance that the South Vietnamese now, for the first time tested in battle by themselves against the North Vietnamese, can handle themselves, that Vietnamization can work and will work, and that we can get out, and they can stay in and hold their own.

Troop Withdrawal Plans

Mr. Chancellor: Mr. President, can I ask you about the plans for withdrawal far down the road? There are 419,000 American troops now in Viet-Nam—I believe that is the figure—and 260,000 will be there in the spring of 1971 according to your withdrawal formula.

But what happens after that? Will we find ourselves in the position where we will have to keep a couple of hundred thousand men there logistically for some period of time or, sir, do you believe that we should pose that threat to the North Vietnamese that they might have to wait another 10 years while we had 200,000 men in South Viet-Nam?

The President: I suppose that question becomes particularly apropos when you think of Korea, because in Korea we still have 50,000 men and it has been 17 years since the Korean war was over.

In terms of South Viet-Nam, I think we could put it, however, in another way. We are prepared by negotiation to bring out all of our forces and have no forces at all in South Viet-Nam if the enemy will negotiate, if they will withdraw theirs.

We are confident that the South Vietnamese can defend themselves if there is a mutual withdrawal of outside forces.

Now, if they do not agree to it, then we still have a plan which, as for its long-term goal, is to withdraw all of our forces. However, it will be in stages.

As you know, what we are withdrawing now are primarily our ground combat forces, and the majority of our ground combat forces will be out during the spring of next year. The 265,000 will—that number, of course, will be a majority of our ground combat forces.

Now, when it comes to naval forces and air forces which require more sophisticated training and the rest, it will take a longer time to get them out, but I again come back to this proposition: Our long-term goal is to get them all out, and short-term, if the enemy is willing to negotiate with our new ambassador, we will get them all out within a year if they are willing to negotiate.

Policy on Setting Terminal Date

Mr. Sevareid: Mr. President, you have always refused to set a definite terminal date for our final withdrawal from Viet-Nam, on the grounds the enemy would just

sit and wait and never negotiate at all, as I understand it.

But your advisers always say to us that it would be better for the North Vietnamese to negotiate while we are still there rather than face Saigon alone later on.

If that is the case, then why not set a definite terminal date to encourage them to negotiate, knowing we will leave?

The President: I think the argument that if we just set a terminal date as to when we are going to get out that this might, in reverse, encourage them to negotiate, I don't think it will stand up. I think it is a good debating point to make, and perhaps we could say that the debating point we have made on the other side is just that, but I don't believe it is.

Let me put it this way: Put yourself in the position of the enemy. Also, put yourself in the position of an historian—and all of you are historians; you study these matters, and you write about them, you think about them, and you commentate upon them. You will generally find that negotiations occur, negotiations which end war, only when the balance of power changes significantly, only when one party or the other concludes that as a result of the shift in the military balance they no longer have an opportunity to accomplish their goal militarily and therefore they had best negotiate.

Now, I think one of the positive benefits of the Cambodian operation is that it has changed the military balance. How much it has changed in the minds of the enemy remains to be seen.

I do not say it has changed it enough so that they will negotiate. I think it might help. Only time will tell. But putting myself—again, looking at the enemy, I am con-

vinced that if we were to tell the enemy now, the North Vietnamese, that within, as for example, the McGovern-Hatfield resolution, that by the end of this year all Americans will be gone, well, I can assure you that the enemy isn't going to negotiate in Paris at all. They are not going to talk. They are going to wait until we get out because they know that at the end of this year the South Vietnamese won't be ready to defend the country by themselves.

But if, on the other hand, the enemy feels that we are going to stay there long enough for the South Vietnamese to be strong enough to handle their own defense, then I think they have a real incentive to negotiate, because if they have to negotiate with a strong, vigorous South Vietnamese government, the deal they can make with them isn't going to be as good as the deal they might make now.

Possibilities of Escalation

Mr. Smith: Sir, talking about troop withdrawals, American troop withdrawals, on June 3 you said that if the other side took advantage of our troop withdrawals and intensified their attacks, you would be prepared to take strong effective measures to meet that situation.

Now, in view of the explosions of wrath on the campus at the Cambodian affair, do you think you could reescalate even temporarily the fighting, as you seem to say you might if you had to?

The President: Well, Mr. Smith, when we talk about reescalating the fighting, I think we have to be precise about what we mean. First, I have already indicated in answer to Mr. Sevareid's first question that we have no plans to go back into Cambodia.

And incidentally, I am not as bearish as some commentators have been about the future of Cambodia. If I could digress a moment—I think this is a question that our listeners would be interested in—Cambodia's chances of surviving as a neutral country are infinitely better now than they were on April 30. And they are better, first, because the North Vietnamese have a 600-mile supply line rather than a 40-mile supply line back to the sanctuaries which we have destroyed.

They are better, also, because the Cambodian Government has far more support among the people, and the reporters from Phnom Penh generally have reported that. They are better, too, because the Cambodian Government also has support from the 11 Asian nations representing 300 million people, and I think also they are better for the reason that the South Vietnamese have been very effective when they have taken on the North Vietnamese in the Cambodian area.

They have posed a rather considerable threat to them. I do not suggest that it is still not a fragile situation. It is difficult. But it is possible for them to survive.

Now, coming back to your question, first, when you talk about reescalation, we do not plan to go back into Cambodia. We do plan, however, and I will use this power—I am going to use, as I should, the airpower of the United States to interdict all flows of men and supplies which I consider are directed toward South Viet-Nam.

That is in my role of defending American men.

Now, let's look at the other possibilities of the escalation. For example, we have a bombing pause in the North, as you note. As you also note, one of what was called the understandings when that bombing pause was

entered into was that American reconnaissance flights could take place over North Viet-Nam so that we could determine whether or not they were planning a new attack, and those reconnaissance flights were supposed to be immune from attack.

Now, consistently the North Vietnamese have been shooting at those planes. In fact at the time we embarked on the April 30 operation, I ordered some attacks on some sites in North Viet-Nam which had been shooting our planes.

If those attacks should now develop again, I will, of course, use our American airpower against North Viet-Nam sites that attack our planes.

That is my responsibility, to defend American boys—American men, our boys—when they do come under attack.

Now, when you talk about reescalation in other terms, I do not see that presently as a possibility, presently in terms of what the North Vietnamese may be able to do and what we would do in action to it.

But I want to leave no doubt on one score: I am concerned, as all of you gentlemen have been concerned, about the dissent on the campuses and among a great many thoughtful Americans that are for peace, as I am sure all of you are, and as I am. Sometimes people say, "Well, was it really worth it?" Right after I made this report, one of the members of the press said, "Do you think it was all worth it?"

And my answer quite candidly is this: There are no easy choices in the position I hold, as you well know, particularly when it is one like this. I knew there was a risk, risk of dissent, and I knew that a barrage of

criticism would come not only from the campus but from many others as well.

So I had to weigh that risk. I had to weigh the risk of dissent from those who would object if I did act, against the risks to 435,000 American lives who would be in jeopardy if I did not act, and as Commander in Chief, I had no choice but to act to defend those men. And as Commander in Chief, if I am faced with that decision again, I will exercise that power to defend those men.

It will be done, and I believe that the majority of the American people will support me then, as a majority of the American people, even in this difficult period, have seemed to support me.

Hypothesis: Communist Defeat of Cambodia

Mr. Chancellor: Mr. President, in your report on the Cambodian incursions you described again in vivid terms the dangers of a Communist-controlled Cambodia with its long frontier along South Viet-Nam and the ability that the enemy would have, if the Communists controlled it, to wreck our program of Vietnamization and many other things in South Viet-Nam. But some of us, I think, are more apprehensive than you seem to be this evening about the chances for survival of the Lon Nol government. I surely don't question your information, sir, but people do worry that that government may topple, that Sihanouk may come back, that there are an awful lot of Communist troops in that country.

What will we do then if we have this hundreds of miles of open frontier? Would you then think that we

could mount an international rescue operation or would we have to be drawn in again?

The President: Mr. Chancellor, the hypothetical question that you have posed shows, it seems to me, very clearly why as Commander in Chief I had no choice but to move in the sanctuary areas. Just think what the situation would be that we would confront if the Communists were to take Cambodia and if they had—they, rather than we—had the 14 million rounds of small ammunition and the 190,000 rounds of mortars and recoilless rifles, and all the rest. It would mean that the position that we would be in, and our troops would be in, would be extremely difficult and more difficult than was previously the case, because they not only would have the sanctuaries but they would have the back country to back it up, and they would also have the port of Sihanoukville open—and over 50 percent of the material in the sanctuaries came in through that port. Now you come to the second point. Now that we have cleaned out the sanctuaries, let us suppose—and what you are putting is a hypothetical question and a hypothesis I do not accept, although it is a possibility, because nobody can be sure, it is a fragile situation—if the Communists, despite the support that the present government in Cambodia gets for its neutrality, if they should nevertheless topple it, what do we do? The answer is that we continue in our course in South Viet-Nam to defeat the enemy there, and the South Vietnamese, who are now a very formidable fighting force, will certainly see to it that the sanctuary areas are not again occupied. That is a very real threat to whatever Communist activities might be engaged in in Phnom Penh.

Mr. Sevareid: Mr. President, in view of the Cooper-Church amendment passed yesterday in the Senate, do you feel now obliged to suspend the negotiations with Thailand about our paying and equipping their troops that they were going to send into Cambodia? I think this is forbidden as far as the Senators are concerned.

The President: Fortunately, our Founding Fathers had great wisdom when they set up two Houses of Congress.

Mr. Sevareid: So, you're going to wait and see what—

The President: Oh, yes. Let me say with all due respect to both the House and the Senate—and as you know, I started in the House and also served in the Senate, and I have great respect for the Senate, I served there two years as a Senator and presided over the body for eight years as Vice President—but I think the performance of the Senate over the past seven weeks, going up and down the hill on Cooper-Church, has not particularly distinguished that august body, and the Cooper-Church that came out was not a particularly precise document and was somewhat ambiguous.

Now, fortunately, it now goes to the House, and the House will work its will on that amendment, and then it goes to conference—and, of course, the conference, which most of our viewers don't think of as being a very important body, that is probably the most important legislative entity that we have in our Government, because there they take the differences between a House and a Senate bill, things that were done, for example, that went too far in one direction or too far in another, and they work them out. And I believe that the con-

ference of the Senate and the House, when they consider all of these factors, will first be sure that the power of the President of the United States to protect American forces whenever they come under attack is in no way jeopardized—even Cooper-Church recognizes that to an extent—and second, that they will recognize that the Nixon doctrine, which provides that the United States rather than sending men will send arms when we consider it is in our interest to do so, arms to help other countries defend themselves. I believe that the conference will modify Cooper-Church.

Mr. Sevareid: How do you take it yourself, this action of yesterday—the Senate majority? Do you take it as a rebuke, a warning, an expression of mistrust in your word as to what you are going to do in Cambodia? How did it hit you?

The President: The action of the Senate is one that I respect. I respect, I know, the men in the Senate. Take the two authors, Cooper and Church. They are good men. They are dedicated to peace. So am I.

There is one difference between us. I have responsibility for 440,000 men. They don't.

And I intend to do what is necessary to protect those men, and I believe that as far as the Senate is concerned that—while I will listen to them, I will pay attention to what they have said—I am going to wait until the House acts, until the conference acts, and I believe that the action, the joint action of the House and Senate, will be more responsible, I will say respectfully, than the action of the Senate was.

I don't consider it a rebuke, and I am not angry at the Senate. It won't pay. They have the last word sometimes—or many words.

Consultation With Congress

Mr. Chancellor: Sir, you said in your report that you had unambiguous knowledge of enemy intentions in Cambodia just after April 20, April 21, 22, 23. It has been asked, and I think it is valid to raise it here, could you, in these early days in that week, before you decided to move on the 30th of April, have consulted with certain key members of Congress?

The President: Well, as a matter of fact, when we talk about consultation, you can do it formally or you can do it informally, and I can assure you, Mr. Chancellor, I consulted with a great number of people between April 20 and April 30, including Members of the Senate and Members of the House.

Now, let's come to perhaps really the thrust of your question, and I think this is perhaps something that many of our viewers and listeners would ask: Well, in ordering American men to join with the South Vietnamese—and incidentally, this was 60 percent South Vietnamese, 40 percent Americans, but we carried a very important part of the load—in ordering that kind of an action, why didn't I go to the Senate, for example, and the House and ask for their approval?

Well, now let us suppose we had done that. It took them seven weeks for Cooper-Church. Let's suppose it had taken seven weeks. What would have happened? Well, first, all of this year's supply of ammunition that we have acquired would have been gone out of the sanctuaries. Or even worse, what might have happened is that the rather fearsome defensive barricades that they had in these sanctuaries would have been ready for us and we would have lost not just 330 men—that is too

many to lose in two months, and that is all we lost in Cambodia—we would have lost 3,000 or 4,000.

As far as I am concerned, I had to think of what was right, what was necessary, what would save American men, and the element of surprise was important.

Now let me also add this: If this had been what some thought it was—an attempt to expand the war into Cambodia, to launch a war into Cambodia—then of course I would have gone to the Senate. You can be sure that in my administration we are not going to get involved in any more Viet-Nams where we do not get the approval of the Congress. I will not do this, because I think we need congressional support for our actions, and I trust we do not have to go to the Congress for that kind of support.

But when we have this limited, very precise action, which was limited in terms of the time, limited in terms of 21 miles as far as we were going to go, and which had for its purpose the protecting of American lives, I had to take the action when I did; and I did not think it was wise to give the enemy the advance notice, the strategic warning, which would have taken away the surprise and would have cost us lives.

Constitutional Use of Troops

Mr. Chancellor: Sir, aren't we at the crux of the argument now that is going now in the country. That the executive branch, according to the legislative branch, or at least one body of it, ought to be limited, they say on the Hill, in what it can do in ordering American troops to be used in many different ways around the world? I think we would all benefit, sir, if we could explore your views in a general way on that.

Do you feel that in the modern world there are situations when the President must respond against a very tight deadline or for reasons of security in using American troops, crossing a border with them, when he cannot, under reasons you yourself have described, consult with the legislative branch?

The Constitution says they declare war and you, sir, run it.

The President: Another good example, of course, is the Cuban missile crisis. President Kennedy had a very difficult decision there, and two hours and a quarter before he ordered—and I thought with great justification and great courage—before he ordered the blockade, the use of American men to blockade Cuba, he told the Senate and the congressional leaders. Now, why didn't he give them more time? For a very good reason he did not give them more time. It was imperative to move soon with some surprise and some impact, or the possibility of a nuclear confrontation might have been greater.

That is one example. I trust we don't have another Cuban missile crisis. I trust we don't have another situation like Cambodia, but I do know that in the modern world, there are times when the Commander in Chief, the President of the United States, will have to act quickly. I can assure the American people that this President is going to bend over backward to consult the Senate and consult the House whenever he feels it can be done without jeopardizing the lives of American men.

But when it is a question of the lives of American men or the attitudes of people in the Senate, I am coming down hard on the side of defending the lives of American men.

Mr. Smith: I can see a clock on the wall which indicates we haven't got a lot of minutes left. I want to ask you about the Middle East.

Mr. George Ball wrote an article in last Sunday's New York Times magazine section in which he suggested that the Russians were bold enough to move into the Middle East because we were bogged down in Indochina. Do you accept that concatenation of the two events?

The President: As a matter of fact, Mr. Smith, Mr. Ball should know something about that because he was there when we got bogged down in Indochina, as you recall, as Under Secretary of State. I did not hear his comments at that time indicating that that was the problem.

Now, the second point that I would make is that if the United States, after this long struggle in Viet-Nam, if we do what Mr. Ball and some others apparently want us to do—just get out, without regard to the consequences—I do not see the American people and the American Congress then saying that if we couldn't do what was necessary where the lives of American men were involved in Viet-Nam, that we will do what is necessary because we are concerned about Israel or some other state in the Mideast.

You cannot separate what happens to America in Viet-Nam from the Mideast or from Europe or anyplace else. That is why European leaders—some of them don't say it publicly, but privately—they all know how much rides on the United States coming out of Viet-Nam not with a victory over North Viet-Nam, but with a just

peace. Because if the United States is humiliated or defeated in Viet-Nam, the effect on the United States is what I am concerned about, the people of the United States, and I think we'll see a rampant isolationism in this country in which we will not do what we should do in other parts of the world.

If I can turn to the Middle East briefly, because I think we should spend a moment on it, if you other gentlemen would like. I think, and I say this respectfully, that some of the columnists and commentators—and I read them and listen to them both with respect—and some of us in political life have a tendency to look at the Middle East too much in terms of the Israeli-Arab struggle. We look at Israel, a strong free nation in the Middle East, and we look at its neighbors, its aggressive neighbors, the U.A.R. and Syria, and we see this struggle, and we say, "Are we going to give planes to Israel and are the Russians going to give them to the U.A.R? And how are we going to have a settlement between Israel and the Arab states?"

If that is all there was to it, it would not be as difficult a problem as I am going to put it. I think the Middle East now is terribly dangerous. It is like the Balkans before World War I—where the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, could be drawn into a confrontation that neither of them wants because of the differences there.

Mr. Sevareid: Mr. President, I believe the Russians today at the U.N. are circulating some new ideas about approaching peace negotiations in the Mideast. Is there anything you can tell us about this?

The President: I haven't had a chance to study them yet, but I will say this: that any propositions that the Russians or anybody else circulate that would offer a chance to cool it in the Middle East would be helpful, because when you look at the Middle East, it is not just a case of, as I say, Israel versus the Arab states, but the Soviet Union is now moving into the eastern Mediterranean.

The Mideast is important. We all know that 80 percent of Europe's oil and 90 percent of Japan's oil comes from the Mideast. We know that the Mideast, this area, this is the gateway to Africa, it's the gateway to the Mediterranean, it's the hinge of NATO, and it is also the gateway through the Suez Canal down into the Indian Ocean.

Now, under these circumstances, when we then look at it in terms of Israelis versus Arabs, moderate Arabs versus radical Arabs, and whoever would think that there would be somebody more radical than the Syrians, within the radical Arab states *fedayeen* that are more radical, the superradicals—when we think of all these factors, we can see what a very difficult situation it is.

Now, what should U.S. policy be? I will summarize it in a word. One, our interest is peace and the integrity of every country in the area.

Two, we recognize that Israel is not desirous of driving any of the other countries into the sea. The other countries do want to drive Israel into the sea.

Three, then, once the balance of power shifts where Israel is weaker than its neighbors, there will be a war. Therefore, it is in U.S. interests to maintain the balance of power, and we will maintain that balance of power. That is why as the Soviet Union moves in to support the U.A.R., it makes it necessary for the United States to evaluate what the Soviet Union does, and once that balance of power is upset we will do what is necessary to maintain Israel's strength vis-a-vis its neighbors, not because we want Israel to be in a position to wage war—that is not it—but because that is what will deter its neighbors from attacking it.

And then we get to the diplomacy. The diplomacy is terribly difficult, because Israel's neighbors, of course, have to recognize Israel's right to exist. Israel must withdraw to borders, borders that are defensible. And when we consider all those factors and then put into the equation the fact that the Russians seem to have an interest in moving into the Mediterranean, it shows you why this subject is so complex and so difficult.

But we are going to continue to work on it, and I can assure you the fact that we are in Viet-Nam does not mean that the United States is not going to give every bit of its diplomatic and other energies to this subject as well.

Mr. Chancellor: Very briefly, Mr. President, would you say that the situation in the Middle East is as dangerous to the United States as the situation in Viet-Nam?

The President: Yes. The situation in Viet-Nam, fortunately, has reached the point where we are embarked on a plan which will get the United States out and which will bring a just peace. It will succeed. That I know.

Second, the situation in the Mideast is more dangerous, more dangerous because it involves—and this is not the case in Viet-Nam—a collision of the superpowers.

Neither Communist China, in my view, nor the Soviet Union will have a confrontation with the United States about Viet-Nam, although many have feared that. But it has not happened, and it will not happen, in my opinion.

But in the Mideast, because of the things that I have mentioned earlier, this tremendous power complex, it is not only the cradle of civilization, but it also, as we have already indicated, this is the area that controls so much of the world's people and the world's resources.

The Mideast, being what it is, is a potentially dangerous spot, and that is why it is in the interests of the United States and the Soviet Union to work together to bring this particular danger spot under control.

Mr. Chancellor: Mr. President, I want to thank you very much for being with us tonight. Thank you.

The President: Thank you. I wish we had more time.

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1970 O—398-148