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OCTOBER 7, 1970

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
ON A RADIO AND TELEVISION  
ADDRESS ON THE NEW INITIATIVE  
FOR PEACE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

9:00 P.M. EDT

Good evening, my fellow Americans.

Tonight I would like to talk to you about a major new initiative for peace.

When I authorized operations against the enemy sanctuaries in Cambodia last April, I also directed that an intensive effort be launched to develop new approaches for peace in Indochina.

In Ireland on Sunday, I met with the chiefs of our delegation to the Paris talks. This meeting marked the culmination of a Government-wide effort begun last spring on the negotiation front. After considering the recommendations of all my principal advisors, I am tonight announcing new proposals for peace in Indochina.

This new peace initiative has been discussed with the governments of South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. All support it. It has been made possible in large part by the remarkable success of the Vietnamization program over the past 18 months. Tonight I want to tell you what these proposals are and what they mean.

First, I propose that all armed forces throughout Indochina cease firing their weapons and remain in the positions they now hold. This would be a "cease-fire-in-place." It would not in itself be an end to the conflict, but it would accomplish one goal all of us have been working toward: an end to the killing.

I do not minimize the difficulty of maintaining a cease-fire in a guerrilla war where there are no front lines. But an unconventional war may require an unconventional truce; our side is ready to stand still and cease firing.

I ask that this proposal for a cease-fire-in-place be the subject for immediate negotiation. Any my hope is that it will break the logjam in all the negotiations.

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This cease-fire proposal is put forth without preconditions. The general principles that should apply are these:

A cease-fire must be effectively supervised by international observers, as well as by the parties themselves. Without effective supervision a cease-fire runs the constant risk of breaking down. All concerned must be confident that the cease-fire will be maintained and that any local breaches of it will be quickly and fairly repaired.

The cease-fire should not be the means by which either side builds up its strength by an increase in outside combat forces in any of the nations of Indochina.

And a cease-fire should cause all kinds of warfare to stop. This covers the full range of actions that have typified this war, including bombing and acts of terror.

A cease-fire should encompass not only the fighting in Vietnam but in all of Indochina. Conflicts in this region are closely related. The United States has never sought to widen the war. What we do seek is to widen the peace.

Finally, a cease-fire should be part of a general move to end the war in Indochina.

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A cease-fire-in-place would undoubtedly create a host of problems in its maintenance. But it has always been easier to make war than to make a truce. To build an honorable peace, we must accept the challenge of long and difficult negotiations.

By agreeing to stop the shooting, we can set the stage for agreements on other matters.

A second point of the new initiative for peace is this:

I propose an Indochina Peace Conference. At the Paris talks today, we are talking about Vietnam. But North Vietnamese troops are not only infiltrating, crossing borders and establishing bases in South Vietnam -- they are carrying on their aggression in Laos and Cambodia as well.

An international conference is needed to deal with the conflict in all three states of Indochina. The war in Indochina has been proved to be of one piece; it cannot be cured by treating only one of its areas of outbreak.

The essential elements of the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962 remain valid as a basis for settlement of problems between states in the Indochina area. We shall accept the results of agreements reached between those states.

While we pursue the convening of an Indochina Peace Conference, we will continue negotiations in Paris. Our proposal for a larger conference can be discussed there as well as through other diplomatic channels.

The Paris talks will remain our primary forum for reaching a negotiated settlement, until such time as a broader international conference produces serious negotiations.

The third part of our peace initiative has to do with United States forces in South Vietnam.

In the past 20 months, I have reduced our troop ceilings in South Vietnam by 165,000 men. During the spring of next year, these withdrawals will have totalled more than 260,000 men -- about one-half of the number that were in South Vietnam when I took office.

As the American and combat role and presence have decreased, American casualties have also decreased. Our casualties since the completion of the Cambodian operation were the lowest for a comparable period in the last four and a half years.

We are ready now to negotiate an agreed timetable for complete withdrawals as part of an overall settlement.

We are prepared to withdraw all our forces as part of a settlement based on the principles I spelled out

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previously and the proposals I am making tonight.

Fourth, I ask the other side to join us in a search for a political settlement, that truly meets the aspirations of all South Vietnamese.

Three principles govern our approach:

--We seek a political solution that reflects the will of the South Vietnamese people.

--A fair political solution should reflect the existing relationship of political forces in South Vietnam.

--And we will abide by the outcome of the political process agreed upon.

Let there be no mistake about one essential point: The other side is not merely objecting to a few personalities in the South Vietnamese Government. They want to dismantle the organized non-Communist parties and insure the takeover by their party. They demand the right to exclude whomever they wish from government.

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This patently unreasonable demand is totally unacceptable.

As my proposals today indicate, we are prepared to be flexible on many matters. But we stand firm for the right of all the South Vietnamese people to determine for themselves the kind of government they want.

We have no intention of seeking any settlement at the conference table other than one which fairly meets the considerable concerns of both sides. We know that when the conflict ends, the other side will still be there. And the only kind of settlement that will endure is one that both sides have an interest in preserving.

Finally, I propose the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of war held by both sides.

War and imprisonment should be over for all these prisoners. They and their families have already suffered too much.

I propose that all prisoners of war, without exception and without condition, be released now to return to the place of their choice.

And I propose that all journalists and other innocent civilian victims of the conflict be released immediately as well.

The immediate release of all prisoners of war would be a simple act of humanity.

But it could be even more. It could serve to establish good faith, the intent to make progress, and thus improve the prospects for negotiation.

We are prepared to discuss specific procedure to complete the speedy release of all prisoners.

The different proposals that I have made tonight can open the door to an enduring peace in Indochina.

Ambassador Bruce will present these proposals formally to the other side in Paris tomorrow. He will be joined in that presentation by Ambassador Lam representing South Vietnam.

Let us consider for a moment what the acceptance of these proposals would mean.

Since the end of World War II, there has always been a war going on somewhere in the world. The guns have never stopped firing. By achieving a cease-fire in Indochina, and by holding firmly to the cease-fire in the Middle East, we could hear the welcome sound of peace throughout the world for the first time in a generation.

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We could have some reason to hope that we had reached the beginning of the end of war in this century. We might then be on the threshold of a generation of peace.

The proposals I have made tonight are designed to end the fighting throughout Indochina and to end the impasse in negotiations in Paris. Nobody has anything to gain by delay and only lives to lose.

There are many nations involved in the fighting in Indochina. Tonight, all those nations, except one, announce their readiness to agree to a cease-fire. The time has come for the government of North Vietnam to join its neighbors in a proposal to quit making war and to start making peace.

As you know, I have just returned from a trip which took me to Italy, Spain, Yugoslavia, England and Ireland.

Hundreds of thousands of people cheered me as I drove through the cities of those countries.

They were not cheering for me as an individual. They were cheering for the country that I was proud to represent -- the United States of America. For millions of people in the free world, the non-aligned world and the Communist world, America is a land of freedom, of opportunity, of progress.

I believe there is another reason they welcomed me so warmly in every country I visited, despite their wide differences in political systems and national backgrounds.

In my talks with leaders all over the world, I find that there are those who may not agree with all of our policies. No world leader to whom I have talked fears that the United States will use its great power to dominate another country or to destroy its independence. We can be proud that this is the cornerstone of America's foreign policy.

There is no goal to which this nation is more dedicated, and to which I am more dedicated than to build a new structure of peace in the world where every nation, including North Vietnam as well as the South Vietnamese, can be free and independent with no fear of foreign aggression or foreign domination.

I believe every American deeply believes in his heart that the proudest legacy the United States can leave during this period when we are the strongest nation of the world is that our power was used to defend freedom, not to destroy it; to preserve the peace, not to break the peace.

It is in that spirit that I make this proposal for a just peace in Vietnam and in Indochina.

I ask that the leaders in Hanoi respond to this proposal in the same spirit. Let us give our children what we have not had in this century, a chance to enjoy a generation of peace.

Thank you. Good night.