

**ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT NIXON ON THE CAMBODIAN
SANCTUARY OPERATION, JUNE 3, 1970¹**

Good evening, my fellow Americans.

One month ago, I announced a decision ordering American participation with South Vietnamese forces in a series of operations against Communist-occupied areas in Cambodia which have been used for five years as bases for attacks on our forces in South Vietnam.

This past weekend, in the Western White House in California, I met with Secretary Laird, General Abrams and other senior advisors to receive a firsthand report on the progress of this operation.

Based on General Abrams' report, I can now state that this has been the most successful operation of this long and very difficult war.

Before going into the details which form the basis for this conclusion, I believe it would be helpful to review briefly why I considered it necessary to make this decision, what our objectives were; and the prospects for achieving those objectives.

You will recall that on April 20, I announced the withdrawal of an additional 150,000 American troops from Vietnam within a year—which will bring the total number withdrawn, since I have taken office, to 260,000. I also reaffirmed on that occasion our proposals for a negotiated peace.

At the time of this announcement I warned that if the enemy tried to take advantage of our withdrawal program by increased attacks in Cambodia, Laos, or South Vietnam in a way that endangered the lives of our men remaining in South Vietnam, that I would, in my capacity as Commander-in-Chief of our Armed Forces, take strong action to deal with that threat.

Between April 20 and April 30, Communist forces launched a series of attacks against a number of key cities in neutral Cambodia. Their objective was unmistakable—to link together bases they had maintained in Cambodia for five years in violation of Cambodian neutrality. The entire six-hundred-mile Cambodian-South Vietnam border would then have become one continuous hostile territory from which to launch assaults upon American and allied forces.

This posed an unacceptable threat to our remaining forces in South Vietnam. It would have meant higher casualties. It would have jeopardized our program for troop withdrawals. It would have meant a longer war. And—carried out in the face of an explicit warning from this Government—failure to deal with the enemy action would have eroded the credibility of the United States before the entire world.

After very intensive consultations with my top advisors, I directed that American troops join the South Vietnamese in destroying these major enemy bases along the Cambodian frontier. I said when I made this announcement: "Our purpose is not to occupy these areas. Once the enemy forces are driven out of the sanctuaries and once their supplies are destroyed, we will withdraw."

¹ Congressional Record, June 4, 1970, pp. S8346-7.

That pledge is being kept. I said further on that occasion, "We take this action not for the purpose of expanding the war in Cambodia, but for the purpose of ending the war in Vietnam." That purpose is being advanced.

As of today I can report that all of our major military objectives have been achieved. 43,000 South Vietnamese took part in these operations, along with 31,000 Americans. Our combined forces have moved with greater speed and success than we had planned; we have captured and destroyed far more in war material than we anticipated; and American and allied casualties have been far lower than we expected.

In the month of May, in Cambodia alone, we captured a total amount of enemy arms, equipment, ammunition and food nearly equal to what we captured in all of Vietnam in all of last year.

Here is some film of the war material that has been captured.

This is some ammunition you see. We have captured more than 10 million rounds of ammunition. That is equal to the enemy's expenditures for nine months.

Here you also see a few of the over 15,000 rifles and machine guns and other weapons we have captured. They will never be used against American boys in Vietnam.

This reality was brought home directly to me a few days ago. I was talking with a union leader from New York. His son died in Vietnam this past February. He told me that—had we moved earlier in Cambodia—we might have captured the enemy weapon that killed his son.

Now you are looking at some of the heavy mortars, rocket launchers and recoilless rifles that have shelled U.S. base camps and Vietnamese towns. We have seized over 2,000 of these along with 90,000 rounds of ammunition. That is as much as the enemy fires in a whole year. Had this war material made its way into South Vietnam and had it been used against American troops, U.S. casualties would have been vastly increased.

Here you see rice, more than 11 million pounds of rice. This is more than enough rice to feed all the enemy's combat battalions in Vietnam for over three months. This rice will not be feeding enemy troops now, but rather war refugees.

Now with the rainy season now beginning, it will take the enemy months to rebuild its shattered installations and to replace the equipment we have captured or destroyed.

The success of these operations to date has guaranteed that the June 30 deadline I set for withdrawal of all American forces from Cambodia will be met. General Abrams advises me that 17,000 of the 31,000 Americans who entered Cambodia have already returned to Vietnam. The remainder will return by the end of this month. This includes all American air support, logistics and military advisory personnel.

The only remaining American activity in Cambodia after July 1 will be air missions to interdict the movement of enemy troops and material where I find that is necessary to protect the lives and security of our men in South Vietnam.

Our discussions with the South Vietnamese government indicate that their primary objective remains the security of South Vietnam, and that their activity in Cambodia in the future—after their withdrawal from the sanctuaries—will be determined by the actions of the enemy in Cambodia.

When this operation was announced, the critics charged that it would increase American casualties, that it would widen the war, that it would lengthen our involvement, that it might postpone troop withdrawals. But the operation was undertaken for precisely the opposite reasons—and it has had precisely the opposite effect.

Let us examine the long-range impact of this operation.

First, we have eliminated an immediate danger to the security of the remaining Americans in Vietnam, and thereby reduced our future casualties. Seizing these weapons and ammunition will save American lives. Because of this operation, American soldiers who might not otherwise be ever coming home, will now be coming home.

Second, we have won precious time for the South Vietnamese to train and prepare themselves to carry the burden of their national defense, so that our American forces can be withdrawn.

From General Abrams' reports and from our advisors in the field, one of the most dramatic and heartening developments of the operation has been the splendid performance of the South Vietnamese army. Sixty percent of all the troops involved in the Cambodian operations were South Vietnamese. The effectiveness, the skill, the valor with which they fought far exceeded our expectations. Confidence and morale in the South Vietnamese army has been greatly bolstered. This operation has clearly demonstrated that our Vietnamization program is succeeding.

Third, we have insured the continuance and success of our troop withdrawal program. On April 20, I announced an additional 150,000 Americans would be home within a year. As a result of the success of the Cambodian operations, Secretary Laird has resumed the withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam. Fifty thousand of the 150,000 I announced on April 20 will now be out by October 15.

As long as the war goes on, we can expect setbacks and some reversals. But, following the success of this effort, we can say now with confidence that we will keep our timetable for troop withdrawals.

Secretary Rogers and I have been particularly encouraged by the resolve of 11 Asian countries at the Djakarta Conference to seek a solution to the problem of Cambodia. Cambodia offers an opportunity for these 11 nations, as well as other countries of the area, to cooperate in supporting the Cambodian government's efforts to maintain Cambodian neutrality, independence and territorial integrity. We shall do what we can to make it possible for these Asian initiatives to succeed.

To the North Vietnamese tonight I say again—the door to a negotiated peace remains wide open. Every offer we have made at the conference table, publicly or privately, I herewith reaffirm. We are ready to negotiate, whenever they are ready to negotiate.

However, if their answer to our troop withdrawal program, and to our offer to negotiate, is to increase their attacks in a way that jeopardizes the safety of our remaining forces in Vietnam, I shall,

as my action five weeks ago clearly demonstrated, take strong and effective measures to deal with that situation.

As all of you know, when I first announced the decision on Cambodia, it was subjected to an unprecedented barrage of criticism in this country. I want to express tonight my deep appreciation to the millions of Americans who supported me then and who have supported me since in our efforts to win a just peace.

But I also understand the deep divisions in this country over the war. I realize that many Americans are deeply troubled. They want peace. They want to bring the boys home. Let us understand once and for all that no group has a monopoly on those concerns. Every American shares those desires; I share them very deeply.

Our differences are over the best means to achieve a just peace.

As President I have a responsibility to listen to those in this country who disagree with my policies. But I also have a solemn obligation to make the hard decisions which I find are necessary to protect the lives of 400,000 American men remaining in Vietnam.

When I spoke to you a month ago, a clear threat was emerging in Cambodia to the security of our men in Vietnam.

Ask yourselves this question: If an American President had failed to meet this threat to 400,000 American men in Vietnam, would those nations and peoples who rely on America's power and treaty commitments for their security—in Latin America, Europe, the Middle East or other parts of Asia—retain any confidence in the United States? That is why I deeply believe that a just peace in Vietnam is essential, if there is to be a lasting peace in other parts of the world.

With this announcement tonight, we have kept the pledge I made when I ordered this operation, that we would withdraw from Cambodia on a scheduled timetable—just as this Administration has kept every pledge it has made to the American people regarding the war in Vietnam and the return of American troops.

Let us look at the record.

In June of 1969 I pledged a withdrawal of 25,000 troops. They came home. In September of the same year I said I would bring home an additional 35,000. They came home. In December I said an additional 50,000 Americans were coming out of Vietnam. They, too, have come home.

There is one commitment yet to be fulfilled. I have pledged to end this war. I shall keep that promise. But I am determined to end the war in a way that will promote peace rather than conflict throughout the world. I am determined to end it in a way that will bring an era of reconciliation to our people—and not an era of furious recrimination.

In seeking peace, let us remember that at this time only this Administration can end this war and bring peace. We have a program for peace—and the greater the support the Administration receives in its efforts, the greater the opportunity to win that just peace we all desire.

Peace is the goal that unites us. Peace is the goal toward which we are working. Peace is the goal this government will pursue until the day that we reach it.

Thank you, and good night.