

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

THOUGHTS REGARDING THE PEACE ANNOUNCEMENT

Will history judge that you chose to settle the Vietnam War or that you were forced by circumstances to a reluctant, indecisive conclusion.

The Vietnam War has been the longest, costliest, and most divisive in our history; its ending will be one of our great and important moments. It could also be the greatest moment for this Administration.

Here, if we can seize it and seize it right, is an opportunity to assure for you for all time the coveted title of Peacemaker.

But, as we know, it does not follow that just because we have done something, that we will receive honor or even credit for it.

This Administration, having stayed the long and bloody course, must not be taken by surprise at the very end, and left plodding the vilification instead of ascending the paths of glory to which we are so rightly entitled.

Korea just dwindled away at Panmunjom, and nobody remembers where they were when that peace came. We want people to remember where they were when President Nixon announced

the end of the war in Vietnam in the same way that they remember the other momentous events in their lives, like Pearl Harbor, FDR's death, and JFK's assassination.

Unless we plan to mark this moment down in history as our own, it will pass us by, or worse, be appropriated by others.

In fact, unless we forestall it by preparing and planning otherwise, we can anticipate that the media will give minimal attention and credit to your role as peacemaker, and will treat the story rather as the long overdue end of a morally repugnant war, in which the Washington Post and The New York Times spoke for the American conscience and in which your own role is unclear and controversial.

You are the leading actor and you should be the sole, or at least the central, focus of the Vietnam story. We should have our short-term and long-term "media plans" formulated, aimed at limiting the media's own inclinations and initiatives, whether conscious or willy-nilly, to form and direct the reportorial and emotional context of the event.

So the way we announce the peace is very important, and I think that we should do it in three distinct stages.

Stage One would involve a short and simple announcement of the peace itself. Simplicity and brevity would allow the impact to sink in before it has to be complicated by additional facts or explanations. This is the moment people will remember. This makes you unmistakably and up front the peace maker and the peace bringer. Such an extraordinary event justifies and indeed requires this departure from the ordinary format and formulae of Presidential addresses.

Stage Two would involve presenting the whole history of the Vietnam war and its ending to the American people. It is my opinion that the people are neither really interested in nor capable of assessing and assimilating the tortuous processes of diplomatic negotiations. For those who support our involvement, such tales only illustrate communist perfidy; for the war's opponents, they are elaborate and cynical smokescreens around our own complicity and duplicity.

What we should have for the people is a story of the war that they can understand and live with. There is already a revisionist school afoot, and using Beelzebub to cast out the Devil, we should use this to illustrate and support the case we bring to the people. But we should give them the whole story, not just the last chapter.

Whether or not we succeed in the first few days of peace in framing such a context will largely determine the direction taken by what will suddenly become pressing domestic issues in the wake of peace -- issues ranging from the ethics of dissent and amnesty, to nothing less than the future role and scope of American foreign policy in the world. How you handle this will have more to do with your Congressional relations than anything else you do, and you can mobilize more public opinion in your support by doing this properly than by any other manner or means.

We should formulate the history of Vietnam from the beginnings, with which we had nothing to do, to its present end for which we are wholly responsible. Otherwise, the already existing corps of "experts" will rush into an open field, putting the whole experience in what they see as its "proper" critical-analytical perspective (read: at worst anti- and at best non-Nixon). The Fitzgeralds and the Fondas, the Halberstams and Harrimans, the Clarks and Ellsbergs and Baezes are poised in the wings just waiting to treat the end of the war as their victory and to so opine from coast to coast. Which informed spokesmen do we have ready to supply the vast media and other demands for information, explanation, and interpretation, which will only just begin with the end of the war?

Stage Three should be aimed at telling the complete story to the journalists, scholars, statesmen, students, and citizens who are really interested in knowing the complete story. These comparatively few people who are really interested in pursuing the labyrinthine processes of war and negotiated peace should be given the whole story, but it should not be imposed on the more simple requirements of most of their fellow citizens.

Since peace is imminent, we might implement these stages in the following ways:

1. Stage One could be a five minute broadcast made at noon in Washington, preannounced only as an important statement about Vietnam, to which all Americans are urged to listen, wherever they are at home, at work, or in school.

Such brevity would likely increase both the size and attention of the audience and would certainly make the impact of the announcement greater and more dramatic. It would set it apart from the conventional prime-time format which people have already learned to turn-off to. It would also make it easier for schools to broadcast the message internally, thus involving young people, even the very young. Incidentally, it would solve the TV problem of pre-empting (even for peace!) daytime soap operas and game shows. No orthodox

formula will do if this is to be an event that people remember as a special moment in their lives.

2. Stage Two would involve a full-scale address to the nation, perhaps the following evening, at 11 p.m. Washington time, which would present the Vietnam "story" from how it began to how we ended it.

3. Stage Three would be a full-scale backgrounder press conference in the following week which would answer the in-depth questions about the negotiations and the settlement.

Each of these stages would generate its own degree and level of news spin-offs, and each would underscore the course you have determinedly pursued to peace.

One word about the "tone" of the announcement of peace. Hitherto you have spoken either from the Oval Office or from rooms in the Mansion. It seems to me important to maintain this warm intimate, personal sense of identification between the President and the people. It further seems to me that some apt room might be chosen (how about the Roosevelt War Room) which history will henceforward know as the "Peace Room" because that is where President Nixon talked to the American people that day when Vietnam was over.