

Statement by Richard M. Nixon

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AN APPRAISAL OF MANILA

In one significant respect the President's visit to Manila has served a useful purpose. It has helped to unite our Asian allies and to give Asians a visible demonstration that America remains behind her commitment to a Free Pacific.

Every American can take pride as well in the warm reception accorded their President in the many foreign capitals he visited.

It is time now, however, to take stock of what Manila accomplished. It is time to renew the debate on the Johnson Administration's policy in Vietnam, for this war is not only the global issue in this election, it is one of the central issues of our time.

On his return, the President said that he did not seek nor did he receive any new commitments. A number of foreign policy observers have pointed out that the trip has brought us no closer to peace.

In fact, the wording of the Communique from Manila itself, has raised some grave policy questions which should be answered by President Johnson before the American people go to the polls on November 8.

1. The Peace Proposal -- Mutual Withdrawal

The Manila Communique states: "The people of South Vietnam will ask their allies to remove their forces and evacuate their installations as the military and subversive

forces of North Vietnam are withdrawn, infiltration ceases and the level of violence thus subsides."

This states clearly that if North Vietnam withdraws its forces back across its border, and the violence thus subsides, we shall withdraw all American forces out of Vietnam, most of them ten thousand miles back to the United States. The effect of this mutual withdrawal would be to leave the fate of South Vietnam to the Viet Cong and the South Vietnamese Army.

On the surface, a commitment to mutual withdrawal appears to be a reasonable approach toward de-escalation. But, on reflection, mutual withdrawal of North Vietnam and United States troops simply turns back the clock two years and says "let the South Vietnamese fight it out with the Viet Cong."

The South Vietnamese Army could not prevail for any length of time over the Communist guerrillas without American advisors, air support and logistical backing. Communist victory would most certainly be the result of "mutual withdrawal" if the North Vietnamese continued their own logistical support of the Communist guerrillas.

At the moment, the major area where Viet Cong terrorists face South Vietnamese troops without large commitments of either U. S. or North Vietnamese troops is in the Mekong Delta; there the Viet Cong hold the upper hand. Thus, the first question which should be answered by the President is:

Does this new Manila proposal for mutual withdrawal by the US and North Viet Nam mean that we are now willing to stand aloof and let the future of the South Vietnamese be determined by the victor of a military contest between the Viet Cong and the government of South Vietnam?

If this is a proper interpretation of the Manila Communique, our endorsement jeopardizes every strategic American objective in Vietnam.

The mutual withdrawal offer, which would ultimately allow the Viet Cong to regain the upper hand, might be a temporarily successful propaganda bluff.

But what if our bluff is called? What if the North Vietnamese suddenly agree to march their troops out of South Vietnam in step with our own troops, leaving the secretly-supplied Viet Cong behind to terrorize and take over?

That would place us on the horns of a terrible dilemma: If we kept our Manila pledge to withdraw, we would leave the South Vietnamese people to the mercy of the Viet Cong. But if we decided to stay in South Vietnam until the Viet Cong were pacified, we would be breaking our Manila pledge of mutual withdrawal and suffer a worldwide crisis of credibility.

Keeping our national word - honoring our commitments to defend freedom - has cost us dearly. Why endanger our hard-won credibility for this temporary propaganda advantage?

