Eliot Porter answers Nixon

Editor

When on May 8th President Nixon addressed the Nation to announce his decision to intensify the war in Vietnam in response to the Communist offensive, he asked for the support of the American people.

The President's decision is neither morally nor politically justifiable because it is based on misstatements of the origin, nature, and conduct of the war, and on unacceptable premises concerning the consequences of the various possible outcomes of the conflict.

The war is not international—in any ordinary sense—between distinct national sovereignties; historically it is a civil war. The international complexion the war has acquired is a result of massive intrusion into the conflict by the United States and the reaction to the intrusion by North Vietnam.

The United States is not championing the right to political self-determination of the South Vietnamese people; it is defending the autocratic Van Thieu government, which was not popularly elected and was installed and is maintained with U.S. help by military power. The political desires of the South Vietnamese are unknown and cannot be ascertained while the machinery of government remains in the hands of the officials of the Van Thieu regime.

The degree to which the policy of Vietnamization—on which the President's hope for the security of the Saigon government rests—is failing is a measure of the decay of enthusiasm for the war by the civilian population, and of the lack of motivation of the South Vietnam army.

During the years of the United States' participation in this conflict, ostensibly to protect the South Vietnamese from the dire fate of communist influence, it has destroyed a fifth of the forests of the country, rendered uncultivable hundreds of thousands of acres of rice lands, bombed and leveled hundreds of villages, produced more than a million homeless refuges, and killed or maimed by military action on the ground and from the air uncountable numbers of men, women, and children. All this destruction and killing has been perpetrated—the United States Government says—to save the South Vietnamese people.

President Nixon predicts that should the North Vietnamese prevail they will slaughter their opponents in the south in a horrendous bath of blood, but he disregards the blood bath the forces under his command have wrecked on the civilian population in the free fire zones by anti-personnel bombs and napalm. The cruelty caused by these devices is unmatched in the history of warfare.

He asserts without supporting evidence that if the South Vietnam Government goes down all southesast Asia will fall under Communist domination, an unlikely outcome which he illogically insists would be contrary to U.S. national interest and jeopardize the security of the United States.

And he categorically states that for the United States to admit error and to disengage from the Vietnam war would diminish its influence for peace throughout the world and would encourage small countries to embark on military adventures against their neighbors—that the honor of the United States would be impugned. This is a chimera he uses to obtain support through fear.

What he is saying is that peace can only be realized by force; that to act for peace leads to war; that honest admission of error is dishonorable. No, I cannot support his topsy-turvy moral pretensions whence war becomes peace, dishonor becomes honor, wrong becomes right. The only reasonable solution to the Vietnam tragedy is nobly to admit error and offer peace without threats or political conditions.

—Eliot Porter
Route 4 - Box 33,
Santa Fe.