

FROM THE PEOPLE

file

February, 1968

Guest: Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey

Panel: William Theis
George Marder
John Chambers

Q. Mr. Vice President, what loss of prestige has the Administration suffered as a result of the Viet Cong Tet offensive?

A. I don't think it's a loss of prestige; I think there is a growing recognition in America that this struggle in Vietnam is a difficult one, is a trying one, it's filled with uncertainties. I've sensed a steeling of the American attitude, that is a fixing of our desire to see it through.

Q. Mr. Vice President, I'd like to ask you a question that I heard on the bus this morning. Where do we go now in Vietnam? Our military efforts and our diplomatic efforts have failed to budge the enemy toward the peace table. Is it under consideration, that question, where do we go now?

A. Of course that is the continuing question before the Administration, the President and his advisors. The military is but one operation in this struggle in Vietnam, this struggle is being waged on the military front, the political front, the economic, social and diplomatic fronts. The military is a very vital part of it. The enemy has not gained a victory; the enemy has suffered serious losses; the enemy's plan of action to take over the cities, to establish or reestablish, as I should say, so called 'revolutionary administrations', to force the government in Saigon to its feet--to its knees and out of power, all of that has failed. Therefore, what we see as ~~an~~ our alternative on the allies side is to pursue the battle, hopefully to compel the enemy to pay such a

price that he will see the futility of his struggle and at the same time, and I repeat, at the same time to pursue relentlessly, every diplomatic initiative that's humanly possible. You can't be sure when diplomacy will work. We've seen this in other cases, in the Berlin airlift for example. We surely know that in the case in Malaysia, where the Malaysians had to fight the Communists for seven years that there were times it looked almost hopeless, that Malaysia could ever be free, that they could resist the Communist guerrillas, but they did come out victorious, they did win and there was peace established. I'm convinced that if we pursue the course on which we are presently launched, of stern military resistance to the aggression and to the guerilla and successfully beating down the enemy on the military front and at the same time pursuing every possible avenue of diplomacy and hopefully strengthening the political structure of South Vietnam, that we'll see light at the end of the tunnel.

Q. Mr. Vice President, do you share the feeling of some people, both in and out of government, that this recent and continuing Viet Cong offensive is in a sense, their last gasp militarily, including what happens at Khe Sanh, that this is the break point either way.

A. I don't think we can be sure of that. I don't want to make any such prediction. I do think one can safely say, however, that the terrible cost the enemy has paid in lives and in material is one that does drain their resources. I don't consider the enemy to be madmen in the sense of no judgment at all. I believe that Ho Chi Minh will pursue a military victory if he thinks it is possible. If he finds that he can not achieve his goals militarily, he has two choices, either to withdraw from the scene of battle by de-escalation and going back into the jungle and back up North, or ~~going~~ to come to the conference table

in the hopes that he may gain something at the negotiating table. If however, the military effort is a failure and I expect that it will be, I believe that the day of negotiations is closer at hand or at least the day of de escalation and withdrawal back into the countryside and beyond the frontiers. I don't think there is any way to predict when that day will be and I don't think any one can predict or safely predict that this is the last gasp. I doubt it. I think the enemy still has manpower, still has equipment and indeed, the sources of equipment, but I doubt that it will be able to mount as effective an offensive as it has recently. The point that we ought to keep in mind is that the point of this offensive, the military objectives, first of all failed, the political objectives are still in question. I think myself they failed, but if ~~xxx~~ there is still yet another offensive it may be that they can terrorize the population and thereby destroy morale in South Vietnam. I doubt that. I don't think so. I think the evidence is preponderantly against that. And why do I say so? Because there has been no mass defection of people, there was no uprising to support the Viet Cong which the Viet Cong Communist forces expected and there were no desertions or defections of the Armed forces of South Vietnam. And by the way, all the captured documents of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong indicate that they had expected (when I say they, the Communists) had expected that there would be substantial defections and desertions in the ARVN ~~in~~, the South Vietnamese military forces and the popular forces. Instead of that happening, gentlemen, the popular forces, the regional forces, these are the militia type--they fought bravely and not a single major unit of the ARVN, of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam deserted or defected. They fought bravely, in fact their best account in the battle thus far was when the battle was brought to them in their cities.

Q. Mr. Vice President, I wonder if you could clarify this concern that you hear in the Senate and in other places in Washington, that although the enemy paid a very high price in Vietnam, it did accomplish the objective of undermining the confidence in the Saigon's government to protect the cities and the people even with the aid of the United States. Could you clarify that.

A. Well, as a matter of fact, I'm afraid our friends in the Congress have had their eyes fixed primarily on Saigon. Many other cities, many other communities in Vietnam over the past two and a half years have suffered attacks repeatedly from the terrorist, the subversives, the guerrilla and the Viet Cong. We know for example that Da Nang air base has been mortared a half a dozen more times and ~~xxxxxx~~ other communities and metropolitan areas have been under ~~xxxx~~ attack and so that in so far as the safety of any city was concerned there never has been any guarantee of perfect safety. I would think that what this recent attack demonstrated was that while the Viet Cong could run suicidal missions, so to speak, terroristic missions, it was unable to hold a ~~xxx~~ single city, it was unable to get control of any administrative structure. It did not break down the government of Saigon, as a matter of fact as I speak to you, the Assembly, the elected peoples' assembly in Saigon is in session and for the first time that Assembly is supporting the government with a total unanimous vote. Instead of the government being demoralized, shattered, the fact of the matter is that President Thieu is probably stronger today as a result of this attacks during the Tet period than before. And surely Vice President Ky has come to the forefront again along with Gen. ~~Thang~~ Thang, and you may recall that Gen. Thang, the head of the pacification effort had resigned just prior to the Tet attack. What did he do then after the Tet attack, he came

back. He is today, along with Ky, in charge of restoration and reconstruction in all of the cities in Vietnam. He is back in one of the senior positions in all of the government and not a single one of the top officers in Vietnam has, well, gone over to the enemy, has shown any weakness, that is any military weakness. They fought bravely and I repeat, between 85 and 90 per cent of the action in this recent offensive was handled by the South Vietnamese themselves. That's why they had more casualties than did we Americans. They did a very good job and the government still is ~~xxx~~ doing its job, still has administrative control and I think has gained considerable support.

Q. Mr. Vice President, how do we capitalize on a military failure by the enemy out there? Do we increase our military pressure on him?

A. Well, as you probably know, the South Vietnamese themselves are asking for more troops. And by the way, here is another indication of what's developed. Prior to this Tet offensive they've been arguing and arguing in the Assembly about whether or not they ought to have 65,000 more troops which had been pledged ...

Q. You mean more South ~~Vietnamese~~ Vietnamese....

A. South Vietnamese troops. Now the government and the assembly agree that these things must be done. They are calling back men to the colors that had been mustered out, they're extending the period of enlistment, they're calling up young men aged 17 and 18 when before they were arguing about age 19. I don't call that a weakness in the government. As far as we are concerned, the amount, the force levels that had been established are going to be maintained. Gen. Westmoreland made a request for some additional troops but that was within the force levels that had been agreed last fall between the President and Gen. Westmoreland. I think our force level, if I'm not mistaken, is slightly over 500,000

We have no plans that I ~~am~~ know of to ~~to~~ expand or increase that level.

Q. Then if there is an increase in force levels it should come from the South Vietnamese?

A. Well, let me put it this way, one can't predict what will happen in the days ahead, but I know of no plans and there no plans as of now, to increase the force levels of United States troops in the area. There are plans to increase the force level of the South Vietnamese, they will give greater participation and hopefully there are forces that will be coming in from Thailand and other ^{possibly} ~~pinxxx~~ areas.

Q. Should our reservists pluck some hope from that Mr. Vice President?

A. Well I let the Commander-in-Chief speak on these matters most of the time.

Q. Mr. Vice President, you mentioned signs of a stiffening determination in the United States. Do you see the possibility of a more hawkish attitude on the part of the United States pressuring the Administration toward another escalation of the war?

A. No. I was impressed however, with the recent public opinion surveys which show that there is greater public support today for our effort in Vietnam and our commitment in Vietnam. That doesn't mean that all those who support our commitment in Vietnam are happy with the ways things are going but there is no real body of opinion in America for withdrawal. I think this is very important. In other words, when the shock attack came over the Tet period, instead of the American people saying Well, its bad and its terrible and we ought to get out, the American people by the substantial increase in the measurement of public opinion said, no we're there, we're going to see it through. I don't think this means a more hawkish attitude. What I think this means is a greater determination and I believe that this will have a very good effect overseas and particul

in Hanoi. I believe that when the men in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh and his cohorts, begin to sense that their attacks are not demoralizing the American public, are not able to destroy the fabric of government in South Vietnam, they are not resulting in mass desertions and defections of ARVN troops of South Vietnam, I think the men of Hanoi are going to take a second look--I can't tell you what they are going to come out with but if it happened to us, the same thing, gentlemen I think we'd be having some real second and third looks around here. Can you imagine what would happen in the United States if ~~xxx~~ our forces had suffered such incredible losses. Can you imagine what people would be saying about our President and about our officers. Now I know that a police state doesn't have this freedom of public opinion, but you can't stop people from thinking and despite the closed ~~xx~~ society, the word is getting back to North Vietnam that this offensive was not a success, they are unable to hold, they have been driven back, they've been killed by the thousands and there have been more captives in the last month in Vietnam than in the preceeding year. More /North Vietnamese and Viet Cong captives and we're gaining a great deal of information.

Q. What effect ~~xxx~~ has this had on the North Vietnamese public and the government in your opinion?

A. I can only surmise. I don't think we have a ⁿy way of measuring that but I always assume that the opposition has some men of thought and I know they have men of capability.

Q. Mr. Vice President, what do you think, if any, is going to be the effect on our whole national posture with relation to the expected racial unrest this summer if the Senate does not act on the civil rights bill in some form, a bill which has been by the House.

A. Mr. Theis let me put it this way. I believe that if the Congress

7th add humphrey

would pass some of the civil rights measures that are before us, it would have a salutary effect. It would be helpful. But truthfully, and I'm in very strong support of these proposals, not only because they're Administration proposals, but I've felt this way for years, what is really more required than anything else right now is activity and progress on the job front--on the real opportunity front--housing, jobs, economic opportunity, schooling and when President Johnson announced in State of the Union message this great concentration on employment of the hard core unemployed and asked Mr. Henry Ford II to head up the national business alliance of private business, I think this what is closest to the hearts of the people in the ghettos now and what's really close to the hearts of the people in our minority groups. To be sure we need civil rights legislation and the open housing legislation being sponsored by Sen. Mondale in the Senate, I think would be very, very helpful. It gives people the freedom, well, the freedom of movement. I don't think it means necessarily, even if it passed, that there would be any great shift of where people live but people would at least feel that they have the right to live where they want to live and this is very, very important. The protection of civil rights workers is very very important, the integrity of our jury system is very, very important; all of these are important pieces of legislation, but gentlemen it is in my view that the emotional interest on the legislative front is less today than it was a few years ago, and the great concern of the people in the ghettos and the slums is for economic and social opportunity, for a better education, for jobs, for rewarding employment, for the chance to be an active participant in the social and economic life.

8th add humphrey

Q. Pursuing that subject, Mr. Vice President, what more can the executive branch do that ~~it~~ it is not doing now, or has not done in the past, to carry this effort forward and try to improve these realities of opportunity

A. Well, the executive branch through the direction of the President is bending every effort to open up these doors of economic and social opportunity in the field of education and our guidelines on desegregation in the emphasis of educational assistance disadvantaged and our elementary and secondary education acts, our higher education proposal, our youth opportunity program--the President directed me as you know, to be chairman of the President's Council on Youth Opportunity. We're launching for the third year now a very extensive program in cooperation with the governors and mayors and private industry and the voluntary groups of truly a summer of opportunity for young people. It's essentially a summer program. With youngsters coming out of school in late May and early June, what are they going to do? Well, last year, we found 1,200,000 jobs in this country for youth between the ages of 16 and 21. This year we want to step that up to 1,500,000 with at least ~~200,000~~ 200,000 more of the disadvantaged, hard core unemployed young people between the ages of 16 and 21. We'll expand our recreation and camping program. Give you one little example: two years ago the Boy Scouts of America had 265 boys, disadvantaged boys from the slums in their scouting program. Last year with our cooperative efforts, 25,000. This year I just met with them--they're going to have 50,000. Now that's not a great thing, but it's a substantial achievement. Now private industry is going to work on the job training front, on the job placing and job recruitment front. I met the business council, representing some of the top business leaders of the United States. Mr. Ford and myself were with them for a couple

of hours this past week in Washington D.C. and we outlined there what could be done by the private sector and I'm happy to tell you that business in America today is excited about this, they know they have to do it, they know the challenge is there, so with the President working congress and with the executive department and working with Mr. Ford and the Vice President sort of backstopping this, and all of us pushing and pulling together, I think we're going to make some genuine progress.

Q. Mr. Vice President, I spoke only this morning with a member of your Administration who is very intimately concerned with this problem. He said something that I thought--it impressed me very much. He said we were in a race against time, we were in a race against the riots this summer, we were in a race against the black militants, The President's job training program, the concentrated program that you mentioned, provides for 100,000 jobs over the next 18 months, I believe. Is this enough in magnitude to win that race?

A. We provide for 500,000 jobs in the next three years and that's exclusive of the 200,000 jobs that relate to young people between the ages of 16 and 21. Now ~~at~~ I must just as well be very candid about it, and when I spoke to our business leaders I was exceedingly frank and ~~when I spoke to~~ ~~they~~ they thanked me for it. They didn't get, they said, a snow job. They got candor and frankness and the truth. We are up against a hard and difficult assignment. The hard core unemployed are not going to respond to a job opportunity just because you put up a sign and say help wanted. You literally have to go find them, and recruit them and train them and help them adjust to the disciplines of work. Many of these people have never known what it was to be on a job, they've had no experience at work. Many of them ~~are~~ are illiterate, illiterate not only in terms of reading and writing but industrially illiterate.

They have no experience in terms of reporting to work on time. They don't know what to do about a shop steward or even a foreman, what to do ~~in~~ even on a coffee break, how to get on bus and get ~~to work~~ a job. This is a serious and difficult problem. Transportation, health problems. Illiteracy problems are involved here. There are now quick and easy answers, ~~xxx~~ and I must say in all candor, that if people are looking on the job program as an instant cure for rioting they are going to be disappointed. I don't know if this will allieviate the riot problem. I'm not even sure we're going to have riots --I know everyone is talking about them and you can talk yourself into trouble, its hard to talk yourself out. I do think we have to be prepared for a difficult time this summer, but we ~~must~~ ought to look upon jobs and job training and job placement as necessary responsbbilities, as responsibilities and necessitieis in our society. Hopefully it will allievate the tension, hopefully it may quiet ~~the~~ down emotions and ~~a~~ save us from violence and trouble. I can't be sure, but I know we've got to do it. I know without it will be a worse summer.

Q. How do you answer a Dr. Martin Luther King who intends to come to Washin ton this summer with something like his civil disobediance campaign and says you're not planning enough?

A. Well, we expect that men like Dr. Luther King will say that we're not planning enough. I suppose its true that none of us ever do quite enough. We maybe don't even know what is quite enough, but I don't think we ought to presume that Dr. King is going to break the law, is going to be violent. I don't think we ought to assume the worse. I think it might be well if we tried to findx ways and means by which the laws could be abided by and I can assure of one thing, that if there is violation of the laws in terms of criminal behavior by anyone, or

violence or rioting that our municipalities, our states and government are prepared to deal with it, but just as we must seek to restrain violence and we must prevent lawlessness in our streets, likewise we must have a commitment to social justice and to providing the equality of opportunity and not only providing it but helping to make it real. You see there are two sides to this coin. On the one hand, there is no room for rioting and violence and criminal behavior and hooliganism because you don't get anywhere this way, because all it does is to destroy but on the other hand having said that and having restrained the violence or having subdued, it you have an equal obligation to try to break through these prejudices, these barriers that have denied people equality of opportunity and a chance to make something out of ~~xxxxxx~~ their lives.

Q. Mr. Vice President, did you resign from the NAACP about the same time you left the ADA?

A. No, I don't believe I ever did. As a matter of fact I'm not very sure about my memberships but I'm very much in support of the work the NAACP had done through the years, I believe I may have a membership out in Minnesota.

Q. How did you feel about the ADA endorsing your former colleague, I guess he's still your colleague, Sen. Eugene McCarthy?

A. Well, as I have indicated, when I became Vice President I was no longer a member of ADA. I helped build ADA, I'm very ~~xxxxxx~~ proud of that and I was an officer of ADA but I thought when I took on the high office of Vice ~~xxxxxx~~ President it would be both...well it wouldn't help either ADA or me. In other words, they were going to take positions as they have throughout the years, from whatever Administration was in

power. They didn't always ~~g~~ agree with John Kennedy, ~~xxxx~~ ^{surely} they didn't ~~xxxx~~ agree with Harry Truman for a period of time. In fact they were ready to dump him until they got the message and understood what was going on. That's when I came into ADA. They disagreed with President Johnson recently but they supported him actively in 1964. Their support of Eugene McCarthy was something that wasn't unexpected and I think the Senator will have to decide whether this is a blessing or not.

Q. Do you think it will be?

A. I don't like to pass on judgments for my friends. I do ~~xxxx~~ know this--the President's program is one that a sensible, progressive liberal in this country, or a middle of the roader or a good American ought to support. I'm sorry that some people have disagreed with us so strongly on Vietnam that they've let it become the one issue that has beclouded their judgment. But people are entitled to make mistakes you know.

Q. You're suggesting that they may be coming back into the fold after November?

A. Well I surely wouldn't want to deny anyone that opportunity and I'm not going to be scolding people. I would welcome support from any responsible source.

Q. Your fellow Democrat from Minnesota, Sen. McCarthy has suggested that if he were Vice President, feeling as he does, that he would be ~~xxxx~~ silent more often these days. Do you feel a need for that golden substance?

A. Well, if I felt as Sen. McCarthy does, I suppose I would be silent. But I don't feel the way Sen. McCarthy does and just as he expresses his right to dissent, I express my right of advocacy. I have a high regard

13th add humphrey

for my colleague and friend from Minnesota but I'm in strong support not only of the President, but of what the President stands for at home and abroad.

Q. Do you find the McCarthy candidacy stimulating?

A. Interesting.

Q. Thank you very much sir.



Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



www.mnhs.org