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CBS NEWS SPECIAL REPORT

"A CONVERSATION WITH HUBERT HUMPHREY"

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GUEST: HONORABLE HUBERT H. HUMPHREY  
Vice President of the United States

CBS NEWS CORRESPONDENTS: Eric Sevareid  
Martin Agronsky

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MR. AGRONSKY: This is the desk of the Vice President of the United States in the Executive Office Building. From this desk he can see the White House across the way.

A view of the West Wing which contains the office of the President.

The office of Hubert Humphrey has the expected memorabilia, photographic reminders of a busy political career spanning several Presidents, F.D.R. on the entrance wall, Johnson, Kennedy, Truman and photographs of the family, Mrs. Humphrey, his parents, his children, grandchildren, and a rye bit of philosophy.

Sometimes I grow tired of a dedicated people, community minded people, great endeavors, things that some things should be done about, eager beavers. And when I grow tired of such things I look with fondness on gentle philosophies, the light of heart, children.

ANNOUNCER: From Washington, CBS News presents a conversation with Hubert Humphrey. With him are CBS News Correspondents Eric Sevareid and Martin Agronsky.

Their discussion with the Vice President begins after this message.

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MR. SEVAREID: Mr. Vice President, this administration seems to have given the American people several explanations as to why we are in Vietnam, beginning with the letter from

Mr. Eisenhower about aid, and all the way up to the SEATO Treaty.

Do you think this has been well done in terms of persuading the people that there is a clear and consistent policy?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: It is always easier, of course, to persuade people, or to get a message to the American people, if there is a sudden development.

For example, it did not take much persuading of the American people when Pearl Harbor happened. And, indeed, it didn't take a great deal of persuading of the American people after Dunkirk. These were dramatic events that compelled everyone's -- well, that compelled everyone to know what was going on, the information was there, the drama was there. It was rather -- it was simple, even though horrible. And a declaration of war, for example, surely compels people to know what is going on.

In this situation, though, it is much more complex. The war is different itself. It is a political war. It is a guerrilla war. It is an area of the world that is in revolution -- instability of government, the fragility of the -- the fragile nature of the political institutions. All of this makes it very complicated to find any simple, direct answers to the problems in Southeast Asia, or to give simple, direct, understandable statements as to what we are seeking to do.

And it is, as you have indicated -- we sort of approached the Vietnamese situation by walking up and putting our toe into that trouble -- into those troubled waters, and then going in just a little deeper, starting back in 1965, where we made some commitments, economic commitments at that time.

But I think our objectives are rather clear -- to defeat the aggression, to stop the aggression, to prevent the success of aggression, we have said, and to give the peoples of South Vietnam their opportunity to make their own choice, to design their own government, to have free elections for the establishment of their own government, and ultimately to make a decision as to whether or not they wish to unite in one country or to have two countries.

MR. AGRONSKY: Mr. Vice President, to use your own figure of speech, we began by putting our toe in the water, and certainly now we are in it up to our neck.

How wise and how fair is it for the American people to be involved to that extent without a declaration of war?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I personally believe that a declaration of war would only exacerbate the situation. I think it would create a highly emotional fever in this country that would truly escalate the struggle.

MR. AGRONSKY: Why do you think that?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Because the whole attitude of the people changes. The organization of your country changes.

The activities of your government change.

One of the things that we have tried to do in this period is to continue to operate an economy on a rather normal basis without the strict controls that come in by the declaration of war or a national emergency.

Furthermore, you trigger a whole series of events once there is a declaration of war. It is a matter of telling the rest of the world -- join up. It really is putting up a signal that you are not only in trouble, but trouble is everywhere, and you may want to join in that trouble.

MR. SEVAREID: It looks to a lot of people as though the troubles of Marshall Ky in Saigon more or less date from the Honolulu Conference, when he came to see President Johnson. Is there a direct connection?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Not at all. I wouldn't think there was any direct connection. There, of course, this is the sort of a base line for American journalism, because Prime Minister Ky took on added significance in the American mind, in the American communication media, from the Honolulu Conference. He had high visibility at that particular time because the President of the United States was at the conference, and because the conference was a very important conference.

There had to be some identification with individuals because individuals make up government and the only government that was available at that time in Saigon was the government

representatives that the President met with in Honolulu.

I would never want anyone to underestimate the meaning of the Honolulu Conference, and the Honolulu Declaration. If that is studied carefully, I think it has as much significance for the future of Asia as the Atlantic Charter had for the future of Europe.

MR. AGRONSKY: What do you have in mind when you say that?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Because the Honolulu Declaration that came from that conference, while in terms of current history was directed towards Vietnam, it was a much broader declaration. It was directed towards an Asia, a modern Asia, an Asia with abundance, an Asia with social justice, an Asia at peace, an Asia with tremendous programs of social, economic betterment. That is the way I read the Honolulu Declaration. And I have studied very carefully and frankly have been very much moved by it.

I regret that more attention has not been given to that declaration, and a little less attention to the personalities involved.

MR. AGRONSKY: This was the articulation of a Johnson doctrine for Asia?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Yes, I think it was. I really believe that, sir. I had not heard it put quite that way, but as you have said it, that would be as I would envision it and see it.

Now, what was said in this declaration was a pledge to ourselves and to posterity to defeat aggression, to defeat social misery, to build viable, free political institutions, and to achieve peace.

Now, those are broad terms, but these are great commitments. And then you add onto this, sir, our relationships with India and Pakistan, but particularly now India, where the discussions between our two governments have gone far beyond just food; they have gone into the whole matter of development of the economy, the social, political structure.

I think there is a tremendous new opening here for realizing the dream of the Great Society in the great area of Asia, not just here at home. And I regret that we have not been able to dramatize it more.

MR. SEVAREID: Mr. Vice President, there are immense implications, it seems to me, in what you are saying here.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Yes.

MR. SEVAREID: You seem to me to be saying that the Johnson doctrine, if we may call it that, is proposing a relationship between this country and Asia, far away as it is, and sprawling and diverse as it is, a relationship as fundamental, as long-lasting, intimate, and possibly expensive as our historic associations with Europe. Is it of this scale, of this magnitude?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I think so.

MR. SEVAREID: Then the American people have not really been told that we are taking on another half of the world as our intimate and chief responsibility.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Well, I don't think they ought to be called that, because that is not the case. It is not our responsibility. I think the American people have been told, again by the cruel facts of war in Vietnam, that we are involved in Asia. Whatever one may think about the struggle in Vietnam -- and there are honest differences of opinion about how it ought to be conducted, whether we ever should have been there and how we are going to get out -- and I don't want to spend my time arguing the details of that.

We have our problems there; but I do know this, that we are there and that it is almost like the first voyage of an explorer into a new land. The ship has almost been cast, has almost been tossed -- storm tossed on the shore and on the beach, but we are there. And we are going to be in Asia for a long, long time. That is what these hearings are all about, about our relationship with Communist China. There is no way that we can really ignore this part of the world, or should we.

We can't be a great power like America with a half world or, as I have said so many times, a world power with a half world involvement, or a world power with a half world knowledge.

Our first objective, it seems to me, should be to be

better acquainted with this part of the world in depth, to know more. And I suppose one in public life should not admit his own inadequacies, but it is very difficult for anyone to conceal them, so you might just as well admit them. How little we know, how regrettably how little I have known about Asia -- even though I thought I was a student of government and of international politics, if not a good practitioner, at least a student of it. But now Vietnam has compelled us to take a good look at where we are and whether we -- and what we are going to do about this part of the world.

It does not mean that we manage it. The one thing that I learned on my visit to Asia, the one impression that I came back with was that Asians themselves want to make Asian policy, they want to take their own initiatives, they want our help, they want our cooperation, they desperately need it. They need our know-how. They need our technical assistance.

When I returned I said to many of my associates in government, this is going to really challenge us. This will be the test of our leadership capability. We have great military men in our nation. We have powerful weapons. I think we can be very proud of their achievements and their competence. The question is do we have the same statesmanship quality to help build nations.

+ We are literally being called upon to help a people build a whole new society. And I have said to many of my good liberal

friends in government -- I said, "Look, we ought to be excited about this challenge, because here is where we can put to work some of our ideas of how a -- nation building, of new concepts of education, development of local government, the improvement of the health standards of people, and really the achievement and the fulfillment of social justice.

MR. SEVAREID: This Vietnam war seems to have become a kind of a measuring rod for a person's general political philosophy in this country, and we are told now, in the press and by many speakers around the country, that you are losing your liberal identification and your liberal following, after a lifetime of enjoying it, because of your support of this war.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Did you say a lifetime of enjoying it?

MR. SEVAREID: You have enjoyed their support. No doubt much pain with it.

Do you feel this is true?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I think it is fair to say that a number of my old friends disagree with me on my position on the struggle in Vietnam. I respect their right to do so and I respect their point of view.

But I must say in all candor that if a lifetime -- and you are right -- if a lifetime of service to progressive and liberal causes and legislation is to fall by the wayside because of a disagreement over an action in Vietnam, then the reliability

of friendship is found wanting.

I have disagreed with many a man in public life on a particular issue, and yet joined with him again with great respect and admiration in another struggle.

I used to lose friends because I was for medicare. I lost a lot of them. I lost many good supporters. They called me all kinds of things. I lost a host of friend when I advocated civil rights. But I was right, and I felt it deeply. It was not politically popular. I want to make it quite clear, that was a political albatross for years. I carried a heavy load but I felt it.

MR. AGRONSKY: You feel it is unfair, then, to take away your liberal credentials as a result of the Vietnam --

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Well, I don't think a man ought to say it is unfair. Everybody is entitled to their own peeve. But I have not really found too many people that dislike Hubert Humphrey for one particular issue. There are apparently quite a few that are not too fond of him, both conservative and liberal.

MR. SEVAREID: I think we might interrupt at this point, Mr. Agronsky and Mr. Vice President; we will be back with this discussion with Vice President Hubert Humphrey in just a moment.

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MR. AGRONSKY: Do you and the President feel, as so many

seem to feel, that abroad the whole American policy system seems to be unraveling, with the NATO problem which you have mentioned, with the crisis in Vietnam? Are we going to be forced to re-evaluate our whole foreign policy position, are we in the process of doing that?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I heard the Secretary of State say the other day, gentlemen, that there had been in the past I think two years over fifty changes of government. This necessitates constant re-evaluation of your policies, a readjustment of your relationships, new forces come into being -- the situation in the Congo, for example -- two years ago it was entirely different than it is today. The situation in Rhodesia today is entirely different than it was even six months ago. Obviously the situation in Brazil is much different than it was two or three years ago.

All I am saying is that a big power such as the United States, or a large power such as the Soviet Union, constantly has to readjust and re-evaluate its endeavors, its diplomatic, its economic programs, and its overseas endeavors.

MR. SEVAREID: Mr. Vice President, you make these changes sound more or less like a normal process. But surely the change in Europe is a breakup of the fundamental patterns of European power and its balance as we have known it for twenty years. I am at a loss to see what conception this government has of the new Europe that is going to arrive, what we want to

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see.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Well, I don't suppose that I am capable of giving you a blueprint of the kind of new Europe that will arise, and I must say that I doubt that you build -- I doubt that societies are created out of blueprints. They generally come out of the pragmatic approach of experience and sometimes even sad experience.

We learned a great deal out of the sadness of and the tragedy of war, and out of depression.

MR. AGRONSKY: What are we going to do about living in a Europe without France, which is deliberately excluding itself from participation in Western European life and policy and defense?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I think what the Secretary of State has indicated is that it is possible to have a NATO, that is, a North Atlantic Treaty Organization, without France. And, of course, it is. The other fourteen members can have an integrated command, can have political consultation, that is, the NATO consultative body or the NATO Council. These things can be.

Now, if you ask me, will it be as strong as if you had France within it, my answer would be, in candor, no. Western Europe with France an integral part of a Western European alliance or a Western European treaty organization like NATO, is a better Western Europe -- that is, it is a stronger one.

It is stronger politically, it is stronger militarily, and I think it is stronger economically. But I don't think we ought to say that if any one country drops out, that this is the end of the road.

I do think it is fair to say that NATO without France will make Germany a much more significant power. It will place a greater power emphasis upon Germany. But we are going to move ahead, to preserve NATO, if France -- and France will, under de Gaulle, pursue its independent course.

France wants, under President de Gaulle, wishes to pursue an independent policy, but at the same time to have the umbrella of American power and Western European integrated power as her protection. She wants total defense without total commitment.

MR. AGRONSKY: Would it be fair to say, Mr. Vice President, that the American view of France today might be predicated on the feeling that de Gaulle, after all, is not immortal?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: It is my view that France will come back into a Western European alliance, an integrated alliance. I think France is needed. As long as President de Gaulle is the leader of the French Republic, she will pursue a very independent course. And I think we have to be prepared for that.

By the same token, I do not expect France to be unaware of her own defense, and she knows that her relationships with the United States are very important. She will want to have

bilaterals, that is, treaties with the several European countries. She just doesn't want to have her so-called sovereignty touched.

MR. SEVAREID: What kind of a treaty do you think de Gaulle wants with the Russians?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I don't think we have any real evidence yet as of this moment what the President of the Republic of France will do. But I am sure of one thing, that he will attempt to convey to all of Europe his idea and his dream of a Europe between the Atlantic and the Urals, a Europe of peace, and as he thinks of it, a Europe more closely allied, more closely -- not integrated -- that word doesn't fit into his picture or pattern -- but a Europe of non-aggression. There has even been talk of non-aggression pacts.

These things are not particularly frightening to anyone. I think that you ought to look with some favor upon creative thought about political arrangements in Europe.

MR. SEVAREID: Is this a time for President Johnson to go to Europe?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: The President has never suggested that I should be his tour director or to outline his travel program. I think it would be better to put that question to the President, and you will have that opportunity some day, I am sure.

MR. SEVAREID: I make the personal assumption that you

would like to be President some day and on that assumption, may I ask you, wouldn't you have a freer and easier track towards that ultimate ambition, assuming it is yours, if you were still a Senator and not Vice President?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: There are those that feel that way and have said so.

MR. SEVAREID: I was asking about your feelings.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I am the Vice President. I wanted to be Vice President. I feel that I can offer something to my country in this position. I am at the center of the decision-making processes of our government. I make some contribution. I would not want anyone to think that the Vice President is a man of great power. He has responsibility without authority. He has prestige without power.

I would like to believe, gentlemen, that I have read history and studied American government. I used to teach it. And I want to say that there are very few professors of political science that spend one lecture on the Vice Presidency. And maybe that is all it deserves.

But I think from here on out -- not from the day of Hubert Humphrey, but going into the 20th Century, particularly the -- starting in the thirties, that the office of the Vice President will command much more attention.

MR. AGRONSKY: Mr. Vice President, Eric has raised the question of your own personal ambition for the Presidency,

which we do not ask that you accept or deny.

But there is a consensus in the country that the major obstacle in the path of that personal ambition -- and we speak now of course in terms of 1972 -- would be the Senator from New York, Robert Kennedy.

Now, what do you think of the press pre-occupation with that particular issue? How does it affect you? Does it damage you in any way politically? Is it important?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Well, you men of the media must have something to write about and talk about, and there is nothing better than people.

Of course, the Senator from New York is an extremely able man, a fine family, well-known American family.

The Vice President is a political officer.

I am somewhat flattered, I might say, because most Vice Presidents didn't get written up quite that much.

But to predict 1972, that is really quite a ways off. And I venture to say that both the Senator from New York and the Vice President cannot make any safe predictions about what will happen by 1972. There may be many other people on the political horizon that will over-shadow us all. That is entirely probable.

Who knows what those days ahead will offer.

Now, to answer your question -- how does this affect me; it interests me. But it really does not upset me. It surely does not impede my activities. And, quite frankly, I don't

sit around day and night plotting and planning how I am going to better my political position.

MR. SEVAREID: Perhaps part of your problem, a continuing one, is that one-half the American population is about twenty-five years of age or under, and memories are short.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: That is right. I am young of heart. I understand that fully well.

MR. SEVAREID: And the young heroes are the popular heroes.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Well, heroes come and go.

I must say that one of the observations of politics is to remember that popularity is sometimes short-lived. Also that your stand on a particular issue can change your acceptance or can give you acceptance or rejection.

I don't think you can make long-term predictions.

MR. SEVAREID: Mr. Vice President, you have given us a lot of time. You have been very responsive. We are very grateful.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Thank you.

MR. SEVAREID: I think this might be the point to terminate the conversation.

ANNOUNCER: A Conversation with Hubert Humphrey was pre-recorded and edited under the supervision and control of CBS News.



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