



AmericanRhetoric.com

Henry Kissinger

Eulogy for Richard Nixon

delivered 27 April 1994, Yorba Linda, California



AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio

During the final week of Richard Nixon's life, I often imagined how he would have reacted to the tide of concern, respect, admiration, and affection evoked by his last great battle.

His gruff pose of never paying attention to media comment would have been contradicted by a warm glow and the ever so subtle hint that another recital of the commentary would not be unwelcome. And without quite saying so, he would have conveyed that it would mean a lot to him if Julie and Tricia, David and Ed were told of his friends' pride in this culmination to an astonishing life.

When I listened -- When I learned the final news, by then so expected yet so hard to accept, I felt a profound void. In the words of Shakespeare, "He was a man, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again."¹



AmericanRhetoric.com

In the conduct of foreign policy, Richard Nixon was one of the seminal Presidents. He came into office when the forces of history were moving America from a position of dominance to one of leadership. Dominance reflects strength. Leadership must be earned. And Richard Nixon earned that leadership role for his country with courage, dedication, and skill.

When Richard Nixon took his oath of office, 550,000 Americans were engaged in combat in a place as far away from the United States as it was possible to be. America had no contact with China, the world's most populous nation; nor negotiations with the Soviet Union, the other nuclear superpower; most Muslim countries had broken diplomatic relations with the United States; and Middle East diplomacy was stalemated -- all of this in the midst of the most anguishing domestic crisis since the Civil War.

When Richard Nixon left office, an agreement to end the war in Vietnam had been concluded, and the main lines of all subsequent policy were established: permanent dialogue with China; readiness without illusions to ease tensions with the Soviet Union; a peace process in the Middle East; the beginning, via the European Security Conference, of establishing human rights as an international issue, weakening Soviet hold on Eastern Europe.

Richard Nixon's foreign policy goals were long-range, and he pursued them without regard to domestic political consequences. When he considered our nation's interest at stake, he dared confrontations despite the imminence of elections and also in the midst of the worst crisis of his life. And he bore -- if with some pain -- the disapproval of long-time friends and allies over relaxing tensions with China and the Soviet Union.

He drew strength from a conviction he often expressed to me: "The price for doing things halfway is no less than for doing it completely; so we might as well do them properly." Thus Richard Nixon's greatest accomplishment was as much moral as it was political: to lead from strength at a moment of apparent weakness; to husband the nation's resilience and thus to lay the basis for victory in the Cold War.



AmericanRhetoric.com

Shy and withdrawn, Richard Nixon made himself succeed in the most gregarious of professions and steeled himself to conspicuous acts of extraordinary courage. In the face of wrenching domestic controversy -- controversy, he held fast to his basic theme that the greatest free nation in the world had a duty to lead and no right to abdicate.



Richard Nixon would be so proud that President Clinton and all living former Presidents of the United States are here, symbolizing that his long and sometimes bitter journey had concluded in reconciliation.

I wish that, in his final hours, I could have told him about Brian McDonnell who, during the Cambodian crisis, had been fasting on a bench in Lafayette Park across from the White House until, as he said, President Nixon redeemed his pledge to withdraw American forces from that anguished country in two months -- a promise which was, in fact, kept. Across the chasm of the decades, Brian called me the day Richard Nixon fell ill and left a message, "When you talk to President Nixon, tell him that I am praying for him."



AmericanRhetoric.com

So let us now say goodbye to our gallant friend. He stood on pinnacles that dissolved into precipice. He achieved greatly, and he suffered deeply. But he never gave up. In his solitude, he envisaged a new international order that would reduce lingering enmities, strengthen historic friendships, and give new hope to mankind -- a vision where dreams and possibilities conjoined.

Richard Nixon ended a war. He -- and he advanced the vision of peace of his Quaker youth. He was devoted to his family. He loved his country; and he considered service his honor. It was a privilege to have been allowed to help him.

¹ Shakespeare, W. Hamlet. Act I, Scene 2. At: https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/hamlet/page_30/