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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:40 A.M. EDT

APRIL 30, 1975

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President met at 10:30 this morning with the Egyptian Parliamentary delegation. This is the first official visit to the United States by an Egyptian Parliamentarian since 1967.

The meeting gave the President a chance to underline America's intention to work actively for a negotiated settlement in the Middle East, and emphasized the importance the United States attaches to strengthening American-Egyptian bilateral relations.

At 11:00 this morning the President met with the Executive Committee of the House Republican Study Committee in the Roosevelt Room. The President was supposed to meet with this group last week, but they were not able to attend because of the press of business on the Hill. This group represents 70 to 75 House Republicans. They requested the meeting to talk to the President about a number of issues that Congress is considering.

At 11:45 the President will be meeting with the Republican Congressional leadership to discuss energy matters. As I am sure you are aware, May 1 is tomorrow, and the President will be making a decision soon on what to do about his energy proposal.

Q He has not made it yet?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q There are Republicans on the Hill saying he has already made it.

MR. NESSEN: Let me back up when I say no, he has not made his decision. He has not announced his decision.

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Q Is he going to tell this group?

MR. NESSEN: That is very possible.

Q Will they tell us, or are you going to tell us?

MR. NESSEN: I am sure they will be happy to talk to you. We will obviously announce it officially.

Q Today?

MR. NESSEN: Either today or tomorrow.

Q Ron, do we understand he has made the decision? It simply has not been announced?

MR. NESSEN: I would say that is fair, yes.

Q He has made the decision?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is fair to say.

Q Is there any particular reason it can't be told now if he made the decision?

MR. NESSEN: I think we will wait and do it when all the necessary documents and statements are prepared.

At 2:00 the President will meet with a group from Detroit to discuss the Detroit Plan, which is a plan to revitalize downtown Detroit. I don't have a complete list of participants. We will post that later. Among them are Governor Milliken, Mayor Coleman Young of Detroit, Henry Ford, Leonard Woodcock, Senators Griffin and Hart, Secretary Coleman, Attorney General Levi, Secretary Hills, Jim Lynn, Jim Cannon and Bill Seidman, and others.

At 6:15 the President is meeting with the Chowder and Marching Club and the SOS in the Residence. I think most of you know these are groups of Congressmen and former Congressmen.

Q What is the SOS?

MR. NESSEN: It does not stand for anything. It is like SOS.

The President does periodically meet with these groups.

Q Is that SOS all Republican?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know all that much about these Hill groups. I will check that for you. I don't know.

Q Is that open for coverage?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is not, Fran.

Q Did you find out who paid for the other receptions last week?

MR. NESSEN: I did not, but I will try.

Tomorrow at 10:30, the President is meeting with the Prime Minister of Tunisia, just to refresh your memory.

At 12:15 tomorrow, the President will participate in the swearing-in of Rogers Morton as Secretary of Commerce. That ceremony is at the Commerce Department. We will have further details for you. I think we will not have a briefing tomorrow in light of the timing of that swearing-in.

Q Why?

MR. NESSEN: Just to remind you, there is a trip to Winchester on Friday, and a trip to Norfolk on Saturday.

Q Can't we have a briefing a little earlier tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: We will take an assessment in the morning and see if one is needed. At the moment, let's not plan on one.

Q Can you give us more details on the trips to Winchester and Norfolk?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any more details at the moment, Peter, but we will in plenty of time.

Q So, there will be no briefing until next Monday if you don't brief tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: We will take a look at it in the morning, Bob, and see whether there is anything to talk about tomorrow.

Q What if there is nothing to talk about, but if there are questions to be asked by us?

MR. NESSEN: You have got the whole office full of press people, and we are always happy to answer your questions.

Q Ron, we want a briefing tomorrow.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, we won't plan on one, but we will take another look at in the morning, Gene.

Q Do we have something to say about it?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, if we don't have a briefing and there are questions, we are here to answer your questions.

Q Ron, it is not the same thing to simply go in and ask a secretary or one of your deputies --

MR. NESSEN: I am not talking about a secretary. I am talking about myself, Bill Greener, Jack Hushen, Larry Speakes --

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Q I think it deserves some discussion. It seems to me you are being very arbitrary about whether or not you are going to brief the rest of this week and there are many questions we would like to ask you as the spokesman for the President.

MR. NESSEN: I am right here tomorrow.

Q But you are not briefing so we can have an answer on the record the same day.

MR. NESSEN: We will take a look at it in the morning and see whether we will.

Q Do you regard the briefing as your decision, whether to hold it or not? Is it your prerogative?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q And from now on, you are going to decide whether you want to answer questions from this podium or not.

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it is from now on, Bob. I think it has always been that way. I think we have a good record of having briefings.

Q Ron, it is a question of access here. I have much easier access to you personally in this briefing than I do when you are in that office.

Q I second that.

MR. NESSEN: We are available all day every day to answer questions.

Q Ron, is there going to be a briefing Friday?

MR. NESSEN: I will give you a rundown on the trips if you want them, some rough times.

For Winchester, on Friday, press check-in at the Southwest Gate of the White House at noon. The trip to Winchester will be by bus. The buses leave at 12:15 from the Southwest Gate. The buses arrive at the Winchester Handley High School at 2:15. You should plan to eat before the trip. So, obviously, there will be no briefing on Friday because of the time of the departure.

Q May I interject once again, then, as somebody just pointed out, if it happens that you don't brief tomorrow, you won't be briefing Friday; there aren't usually briefings on Saturday; and some, what, four days go by before there is a briefing by the Press Secretary.

MR. NESSEN: Except the whole staff of the Press Office is available for questions all day every day, Peter.

Q Under that rationale, you don't need to have briefings at all, ever.

Q You are opening up a possibility despite the fact you say you have a good record and that you are available -- you are opening up the possibility that at the time the Vietnam crisis is ending and a lot of other things are going on, that you might not be available for briefings for four days.

I am sure everybody in this room wants to enter a most vigorous protest against that possibility.

MR. NESSEN: We will check in the morning. We will reassess it in the morning.

On Saturday, the check-in at Andrews Air Force Base is 9:00. There will be no bus. At 9:30, the press plane leaves Andrews for the Norfolk Naval Air Station.

At 10:15, the press plane arrives at the Naval Air Station in Norfolk. As you see, the flight is 45 minutes so there won't be time to serve breakfast on the plane. There will be sweet rolls and coffee, and hot sandwiches coming back.

So, if you want a big breakfast, eat at home.

Q What time are we leaving Norfolk?

Q And what about the pools?

MR. NESSEN: We will have a more detailed schedule as the week goes on. I just wanted to give you a rough outline.

Q Is there a rough estimate on when we return from Winchester and Norfolk?

MR. NESSEN: Winchester, I think the President is supposed to be back here at 6:00. The press will be back approximately at 8:00.

Q What about Norfolk? Because of the dinner Saturday night.

MR. NESSEN: The press will be back at 3:00 from Norfolk. No later than 3:00.

The President today is nominating Lt. General Louis H. Wilson, Jr., to be Commandant of the Marine Corps for a period of four years. General Wilson will succeed General Robert E. Cushman, whose term expires on December 31.

General Wilson also will be nominated for the rank of full General. General Wilson is 55 years old. He is currently the Commanding General of the Fleet Marine Force in the Pacific. He is a Medal of Honor winner. The biography is not quite done, but will be by the end of this briefing.

We told you the other day Averill Harriman would lead the American delegation to the commemorative ceremonies in Moscow marking the 30th anniversary of the restoration of the peace in Europe. I can now give you the names of the other members of the delegation.

They are Ambassador John D. S. Eisenhower, General Alfred Gruenther, Mrs. Llewellyn Thompson, General Lyman Lemnitzer, and Mrs. Charles Bohlen. I think you know probably, on your own, the connection that each of these people had with the period of World War II.

Q What is the date of that?

MR. NESSEN: It is May 8. The ceremonies are in Moscow.

Q Can I ask something about the Saturday trip? Is the President going to give a speech down there at the time he inaugurates his boat?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. I think the Naval people would have a problem with that. (Laughter)

The President is sending a telegram congratulating Mrs. Jerry Pettis, the widow of the late Congressman Pettis, for her election in a special election to fill the seat of her late husband and the President considers this to be a good omen for Republican candidates.

Q You mean all they have to do is die first?
(Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: That is why we have briefings.

Okay, fire away.

Q Has the President sent, or been in touch with, the families of the four men killed in the last days in Saigon?

MR. NESSEN: He either has, or will, Fran.

Q Will we find out about that, and how?

MR. NESSEN: I will.

Q What is the President's reaction to the surrender?

MR. NESSEN: It was obvious from the escalating demands of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese in the past several days -- it became obvious that their ultimate goal was the unconditional surrender, and given the military situation, this did seem to be the inevitable result.

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Q Ron, do we have any way of communicating with Saigon now, the government?

MR. NESSEN: You mean with the government?

Q Not only with the government, with anybody. How will we get information from Saigon to this government now?

MR. NESSEN: George Esper is filing away like crazy.

I don't know what you mean about communicating.

Q How are we getting -- we as a Government --

MR. NESSEN: Who is we?

Q The White House, the Defense Department, State -- getting information out of Saigon as to what is happening?

MR. NESSEN: There are no Americans there to file information anymore, except for newsmen.

Q Ron, Kissinger said yesterday, I believe, we would know today how many Americans chose to stay. Do we know that?

MR. NESSEN: Not firmly, no.

Q Ron, do you have a list of those Americans on the carriers?

Q Question?

MR. NESSEN: Peter was wondering whether we had a firm count of how many Americans stayed behind and who they were, and the answer is I don't. The next question was, how many Americans on the carriers. The count has not been completed. Somewhat over 7,000 people were evacuated yesterday, which breaks down roughly to about 6,000 Vietnamese and 1,000 Americans.

Q When did the inevitability of the obvious become apparent to the President?

MR. NESSEN: I don't follow you there, Walt.

Q You were asked for a reaction to the surrender, and you said it was obvious from the escalating demands of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese that their ultimate goal was surrender and the general military situation made it obvious the result was inevitable, too.

When did the inevitability of that situation become apparent to the President?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot give you a precise time, Walt.

Q It would be helpful, especially in gauging the timing of the evacuation, if we could get that.

MR. NESSEN: I say I cannot pin it down to an exact minute.

Q Ron, these two members of the Embassy staff that were left behind, are we going to get them out somehow?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard there were two members of the Embassy staff left behind.

Q This was stated last night.

MR. NESSEN: By whom?

Q CBS and Walter Cronkite.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any indication that there are any members of the Embassy staff left behind.

Q I suppose the Secretary was erroneous when he told us yesterday that Ambassador Graham Martin was on the last helicopter out?

MR. NESSEN: He was on the last chopper carrying evacuees out, and then the security guard was taken out after that.

Q Ron, how did all that come about? It was our impression you all announced the evacuation was over.

MR. NESSEN: I frankly don't know.

Q Were you all aware they were still there?

MR. NESSEN: At the time of the announcement?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: Somebody was, but I was not.

Q Ron, I don't know whether Kissinger covered this yesterday, but I want to ask you anyway. Are there any plans by the United States Government to attempt to evacuate any other South Vietnamese now that all Americans have left?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q That operation, regardless of whether it was a separate operation or whether it was just part of taking out the Americans, that operation is finished. There will be no further effort to bring out any South Vietnamese, is that right?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct. Some South Vietnamese, I understand, are making their way by various boats out into the South China Sea. I suspect they probably will be picked up.

Q Is a ship going to stand by to pick them up?

MR. NESSEN: The ships are in the area, yes.

Q That was my next question. There were, of course, a large number of ships carrying a substantial number of Marines and so forth in the South China Sea, and off the coast of South Vietnam. Is that flotilla going to stay there for an appreciable length of time, or is it going to return to its various bases?

MR. NESSEN: You better check with the Pentagon on what their sailing plans are. I don't know.

Q Wouldn't the President decide, as Commander-in-Chief, how long that flotilla of ships stayed there?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't know the answer, Jim. The Pentagon can probably help you.

Q Ron, can you tell us what authority the President used to use American military forces to evacuate the South Vietnamese?

MR. NESSEN: The President decided that to leave these people here would endanger their lives, and the specific judgment of how many would be able to be evacuated was left to the people on the scene. The President is proud that he took them out.

Q Is the President disappointed that he was not able to get between 100,000 and 200,000 out, as he had originally hoped?

MR. NESSEN: As many were evacuated as was realistically possible.

Q Do you have any sort of figure on that? We have had figures all the way from 45,000 to 70,000.

MR. NESSEN: It is not possible yet because some left on their own, and have gone to various places, and there is no complete count. Dr. Kissinger used a figure of about 56,000 yesterday.

Q Ron, has the President decided how much money it will take to care for the refugees on a short-term basis, and can you tell us of any plans that he has for caring for the refugees on a longer-term basis?

MR. NESSEN: He does want Congress to pass the \$327 million humanitarian aid bill and to put up the money that goes with that authorization quickly for three purposes. One is to repay the funds that have been borrowed from other accounts.

Q Do you know how much that is now?

MR. NESSEN: I don't, but you can get it from Ambassador Brown. Two is to pay for the needs of the refugees who have come out and will need assistance, and three, to have money available if he decides that it is possible to deliver aid through private humanitarian organizations or otherwise, to the people left behind.

Q How much does he figure number two will cost, to care for the refugees?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't have a figure for you, Tom.

Q Has he sent a message to Congress on this subject?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that he will send a specific message to Congress, but obviously at some point it will be determined how much it will cost and Congress will know.

Q He said that yesterday, to the Congressional leaders, didn't he? That is what Senator Scott said, that he thought there would be a message to Congress.

MR. NESSEN: I think the message he was talking about was an assurance to Congress that the section of the conference report giving authority for evacuation is now moot, and he has assured Congress of that.

Q Does he have special plans for dealing with the refugees who will be coming to this country; a task force, for instance?

MR. NESSEN: Ambassador Brown is coordinating the various organizations and Government agencies and departments in a plan to deal with the refugees.

Q Ron, I understand some of the refugees are coming out with large supplies of gold. Some of it in suitcases and some fancy jewelry.

MR. NESSEN: Let me just add to Tom's question. I don't know what the figures are, but a number of the refugees who are coming out are relatives of Americans. Quite a lot of the refugees are relatives of Americans, and others have American sponsors of various kinds, and these people do have homes and places to go and people to help care for them as soon as they are sorted out and gotten to the right places.

Q Did the U.S. Government advise Big Minh to surrender?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Did we have a role in that decision coming about?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Were you surprised --

MR. NESSEN: I said it was inevitable.

Q We played no role in that?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Does the fact that an American sponsors a Vietnamese mean that that Vietnamese is not eligible for this humanitarian aid?

MR. NESSEN: Point two, of why he wants the money, I referred to the expenses of, through the Philippines, Guam, transportation, and so forth.

Q That was not my question. My question was, a lot of Americans have sponsored Vietnamese, and it is not clear really what they have done. They have done it out of compassion and impulse, but what I am asking is, are they not eligible for funds if they need it?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't know the specific details, but Ambassador Brown can help.

Q Point three, two questions. Do you know how much is in the part three, which is money available to decide if it is possible to deliver to South Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: No, the President told the Congressional leaders and has said publicly, as a matter of fact -- I know Secretary Kissinger did yesterday -- that this is a matter that needs to see how the situation settles down.

Q I understand, but I want to know, do you have a breakdown as to how much of the \$320-some million is in category three?

MR. NESSEN: I don't.

Q And the second part of that is, the way it is distributed, through private agencies and otherwise to get to the people, does that exclude distributing it through the new government of South Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: At the moment it does.

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Q How about the United Nations, Ron? Could it be distributed through the U.N.?

MR. NESSEN: If it goes to the people, yes.

Q Ron, some of the refugees are rather well-to-do, and as I understand it, the Americans who are coming out have to pay their own way. If it is determined that some of these wealthy Vietnamese can afford to pay for the flight and the services they are getting, are they going to be charged.

The second part of my question: Some of the gold is allegedly a part of the national reserves of South Vietnam. Has the President ordered an investigation into those charges and will that gold be allowed into the country if it is determined that the gold being brought out is part of their monetary reserve?

MR. NESSEN: The first part of your question you should address to Ambassador Brown, and the second part I don't know anything about.

Q Ron, can I return to the question earlier that was asked about what authority the President had to evacuate South Vietnamese? I don't think your answer really addressed itself to the question.

MR. NESSEN: The answer is the answer the President wants given and it is the answer the President feels extremely strongly about. He took the people out because they would have been killed otherwise and he is proud he did it.

Q The point is --

MR. NESSEN: The point is that is the way he feels and that is why he did it, and the answer is not going to go any further, no matter how much you push on it.

Q Ron, does the President have any reaction to this surrender over there other than your statement that he recognized the obvious?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Then, I guess we have to ask, does he feel he broke the law?

MR. NESSEN: He did it because the people would have been killed otherwise, Bob, and he is proud he did it.

Q But I mean --

MR. NESSEN: That is as far as I am going to go.

Q I assume he is ascribing to some higher moral law, or something like that. Did he take that into account? That is what I am trying to ask you.

MR. NESSEN: Does anybody have another question?

Q Ron, would it be fair to say, on that point, that the President -- the actual evacuation occurred within the limits that had been agreed upon by the Conference Committee and Congress, and would have been enacted by the Congress. Is that fair to say?

MR. NESSEN: John, it really was not cut that fine, frankly. It was a question of saving as many lives as could be saved.

Q So, you are unable to cite a legal rationale for it?

MR. NESSEN: I am citing a moral rationale for it.

Q Ron, is any thought being given to having any diplomatic contact --

MR. NESSEN: I might quote you a few of the other people who have thoughts on that matter.

The Los Angeles Times, for instance, feels that we can welcome them, find them shelter, offer them a chance to start from scratch again after the personal tragedies and wrenching changes that all have undergone this month.

The Washington Post feels that the effort made to assist those Vietnamese was an admirable demonstration of loyalty to a group of human beings otherwise bereft of hope.

The inscription on the Statue of Liberty -- in case any of you have forgotten it -- I can read you that, too.

Q Just a minute. Why are you and the President so exercised about this point when it seems to be a matter of legal distinctions?

MR. NESSEN: Because he feels it is not a matter of legal distinctions.

Q Is the President under criticism that we don't know about from Congressional leaders on this legal point?

MR. NESSEN: No. I was asked, and I told you why he did it.

Q Could I ask a question relative to the newspapers you quoted? Does the President have any reaction to some of the things we have seen on television, particularly the folks in Florida who said they didn't want the South Vietnamese refugees in this country? Does he have any reaction to that attitude on the part of some Americans?

MR. NESSEN: On the part of some Americans. But I notice that Governor Askew of Florida, and the President was particularly interested in Governor Askew's remarks -- this is locating people during their transit period at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida -- "It is a humanitarian gesture on behalf of the Nation and we will certainly work with the Federal authorities to assume our share of the responsibilities."

Q I don't mean this facetiously, but does the President have a strong moral statement saying these people should be welcome because they are refugees of war?

MR. NESSEN: He believes the vast majority of Americans follow the tradition of charity and compassion that this country has always shown toward refugees and people fleeing oppression. I would guess a lot of us in this room are here because our relatives fled oppression and came to the United States.

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Q Ron, does the President feel the evacuation carried out yesterday ought to be a point of departure for our re-examination of recent restrictions put on Presidential authority in these matters?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard him say that.

Q I am still puzzled by your strong reaction here. Did the President's legal advisers tell him that perhaps he might be in violation of the law or there was a question about this?

MR. NESSEN: It did not come up, as far as I know.

Q Ron, let me see if we get the same point in a different way. You are saying he took them out because their lives were in danger and he is proud of it?

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Now, suppose he had started to take out South Vietnamese four months ago. He might have been able to take out maybe another 100,000 whose lives are endangered right now, but we have not been given any real detailed information on why he did not do that.

These peoples' lives that did not get out presumably are still in danger, according to the official position of this Administration.

Why didn't he do it before is the question I think we are trying to get at. Why didn't they start bringing them out months earlier. Why didn't he bring the Americans out weeks earlier?

MR. NESSEN: I think Dr. Kissinger addressed that yesterday.

Q No, he really did not. He said something happened Sunday night, that he felt the North Vietnamese changed their position, but he did not tell us exactly what. We don't know anything about what was going on in these negotiations. You are talking about human lives. You are talking about tens of thousands of people. We would like to get some answers to these questions rather than a lot of vague generalities about it. I think that is a legitimate point.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q At yesterday's meeting with Congressional leaders, was there any objection raised to doing this, to evacuating South Vietnamese?

MR. NESSEN: No. Which Congressional leaders' meeting?

Q The Congressional leaders were in yesterday for a briefing on the final evacuation, and we are again trying to find out why you are reacting so strongly. I am wondering, is it because some Congressional leaders raised the objection about its legality or propriety?

MR. NESSEN: No, they did not.

Q Ron, going back to my original question, whether or not he is sorry that he did not get more people out, we had once a very high senior official in this building tell us a few weeks ago that we had 150,000 to 200,000. He would like to take one million out. That was not realistic, but at least 150,000 to 200,000 out. We did not get anywhere near that.

Is the President sorry he was not able to get those people out who are now obviously very much in danger?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, the number that were taken out was what could realistically be accomplished.

Q Ron, was there not a limitation set by the Attorney General on the number of Vietnamese refugees which could be admitted to this country?

MR. NESSEN: There was authority for 130,000 with the proviso that if need be, it would be raised.

Q Was a proviso for that?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, since the Communist victories in Cambodia and now in Vietnam come at a time when the U.S. has been moving gradually closer toward normalization of relations with mainland China, I am wondering, is any thought being given at this time to, if not actually formally recognizing the new governments in Cambodia and Vietnam at least setting up some type of diplomatic liaison so that we start out on the right foot, so to speak, not being totally isolated, diplomatically from them?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is too soon to say anything on that subject.

Q Ron, don't we have someone that represents our interests in Hanoi?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I just don't know.

Q Ron, Ambassador Brown, when he had his briefing last week, said the decision to admit 50,000 so-called high-risk people, which includes approximately 10,000 actual high-risk officials, plus their families --

MR. NESSEN: Plus relatives, yes.

Q -- was made in the White House. Was made by the President, I think he said. The question is, why was the limit set at 10,000 high-risk officials in view of the fact that high Administration officials had said 200,000 to 300,000 persons whose lives might be in danger? Can you say what --

MR. NESSEN: I don't remember. I thought General Brown was talking about another category when he used the 10,000 figure.

Q The 10,000 to 75,000 was the range on families. No one knew for sure whether it would be 10,000 to 75,000. A limit of 50,000 was set on those who needed special parole authority because they were high-risk.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

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Q Now, that is a considerably smaller number and presumably a decision was made in the White House and presumably by the President, and it is a question I have tried to get the answer to all week, and what the criteria were for the decision.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. As I said to Gene, whatever the numbers initially set were it was always with the provision they would be raised, if necessary. But to your specific question, I don't know the answer.

Q Ron, to go back for a minute, just to tidy up a question Peter had. This was the number left in Saigon, and the names and so forth. Are those things being worked on now and when can we get them?

MR. NESSEN: You know it may be difficult to get precise numbers and names, but the State Department, if it is possible to assemble close to an accurate list, it would be there.

Q Ron, I want to go back to something, and that is your statement that somebody was aware at the time that you put out the statement that the evacuation was over, that it was not over, and my question is, if that is the case, why was the statement put out?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. As I say, I have not been able to quite figure out all the sequence of events yesterday.

Q Was that a military source who knew?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't know how it happened, Phil.

Q Ron, to change the subject, did the President meet with Secretary Butz yesterday and have they reached a decision on the farm bill?

MR. NESSEN: You mean in terms of the veto?

Q When will they announce the veto, yes.

MR. NESSEN: The veto will probably be tomorrow, Friday at the latest, but I suspect tomorrow.

Q Did he meet with Energy Administrator Zarb and what did they discuss?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the schedule for yesterday. We can check. I am not sure.

Q Ron, do you have anybody in this Congressional meeting now?

MR. NESSEN: I have Greener and Carlson.

Q Are they going to give us a fill?

MR. NESSEN: I think they could, yes.

Q Are you bringing any of the leaders out here in the press area, as usual?

MR. NESSEN: I had not planned to, but I can go check.

Q We always -- when the Republicans come in, we have always had one or two out.

Q Ron, has the President received a report from Ambassador Martin as to the final dates on Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure, Fran. I can check.

Q Ron, does the President have anything to say about the decision between the Greek government and the United States as to canceling the homeporting facilities in Greece?

MR. NESSEN: This is part of a negotiation that is continuing in dealing with a whole range of matters, and there would not be anything to say until the negotiations are done.

Q Ron, can we get a direct quote from the President on this business of the law, and so forth? You say he took the people out because he thought they would be killed and he is proud of it. Do you have a direct quote you can give us from the President?

MR. NESSEN: That is a direct quote.

Q He said to you, "I took them out because" --

MR. NESSEN: -- "they would be killed, and I am proud of it."

Q Ron, what is the status or rather, has there been any change in the White House position on the release of the private messages, communications, between former President Nixon and former President Thieu? Is it still a case that you are not going to put them out and you are referring us to Senator Sparkman or what is the situation now?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q You have no plans to put them out at any time. Is that right?

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Sparkman's people are saying they have not received any letter.

MR. NESSEN: I checked up on that and the letter was mailed by regular mail. (Laughter) So, it was delayed getting there.

Q Do you think they have it now?

MR. NESSEN: I think they have it now because I think another copy was sent to them by hand.

Q Could it have been sent air mail?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know if that would have helped.

Q Ron, on another domestic matter, there is a reprot that the President has withdrawn his support for the bill which would transfer the control of Elk Hills to private enterprise and the Interior Department. That is, to Interior, which in turn, could lease it to private enterprise to pump the oil and that he is now favoring instead retaining the Elk Hills control in the hands of the Navy. Is that true?

MR. NESSEN: Is that the Hebert bill?

Q Yes, sir.

MR. NESSEN: The Hebert bill leaves it in the hands of the Navy, but the President's problem with that bill is not that it stays in the hands of the Navy. The problem with that bill is that the Hebert bill cuts down the amount of pumping from the President's recommendation of 300,000 barrels a day to 200,000 barrels a day. He believes it ought to be 300,000 barrels a day, but that it should stay with the Navy.

MORE

Q Ron, was that because of anti-trust problems in any way?

MR. NESSEN: No, it was for the need for the oil.

Q No. I am saying the choice between the Melcher approach and the Hebert approach, is that based on anti-trust problems at all?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Is the President aware of the Justice Department's renewed investigation of anti-trust on this?

MR. NESSEN: He got a good briefing on Elk Hills when he was out there, and he knows all the details of it.

Q Ron, evidently there is going to be a reassessment of our policy in Asia, according to what we were told yesterday. How will this be handled? Will everything flow through Dr. Kissinger or will there be a broader review of this?

MR. NESSEN: It is too soon to say how that is going to work.

Somebody asked whether Frank Zarb met with the President yesterday. He did, but I don't have the subject matter of the meeting. There was a meeting with Secretary Butz yesterday, also.

Q Let me just clear up one thing. There was never any question in the President's mind that he had the authority to take these people out?

MR. NESSEN: The President took them out because they would have been killed, Bob, and he is proud he did it.

Q Was there a question in his mind about whether he had the authority? We know what he did.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q There was a question?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't know whether there was or not. He did it.

Q Ron, without begging the issue, we were told at the briefing on the night of the State of the World Address very specifically that Administration legal experts did not feel that the President had the authority to do that without a revision of the law, a one-time exception. Now, obviously, that was not granted and I am not trying to push you into a corner or anything. I think the people just want to know, did the President feel he had the inherent powers of his office to go ahead and do that?

MR. NESSEN: Dick, I probably answered the question about four times, and I don't really see any need to answer it any further.

Q You did not address yourself to that question. Why did the President ask for the authority if he was going to go ahead and do it without getting it?

MR. NESSEN: I think probably four answers to the same question is about enough for one briefing.

Q Is there any word on whether Thieu or Ky have expressed an interest in coming to the United States or whether they have specifically asked to come to the United States?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of any expression like that on their part.

Q Anything more on the leaders and their availability?

MR. NESSEN: They probably will not come out here. They will not come out here.

Q Is that meeting still going on?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Could I ask whether Melvin Laird is going to run the President's campaign?

MR. NESSEN: No determination has been made as to who will run the President's campaign.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:25 P.M. EDT)

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 6:40 P.M. EDT

APRIL 30, 1975

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: Some of you have inquired about these two letters that the South Vietnamese put out today. I read the letters, and I reviewed the public record in somewhat more detail than I reviewed it before, and I am convinced that what we said at the time still holds today, that there is nothing in the letters to Thieu that differs in substance from what was said publicly.

I do have a few more of the public statements that were made at the time that appear to me to be actually stronger than what President Nixon said to President Thieu.

For instance, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, William Sullivan, who appeared on "Meet the Press" January 28 and was asked about, "What is our commitment? What would we do if the cease-fire breaks down," replied "There are no inhibitions upon us."

Q January 28, 1973?

MR. NESSEN: 1973.

Q What was he, Ambassador to Cambodia at that time?

MR. NESSEN: No, he was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State. I think later he was Ambassador to Laos.

Q This was when?

MR. NESSEN: January 28, 1973 on "Meet the Press." He was asked, "What are our commitments? What would we do if the cease-fire breaks down?" He said, "There are no inhibitions upon us."

About three days later Kissinger was interviewed by Marvin Kalb, on February 1, 1973.

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Q On TV? On CBS?

MR. NESSEN: I have to assume that is right. Kalb recalled to him Ambassador Sullivan's statement. Kalb said, "Only last Sunday Ambassador Sullivan said, 'There are no inhibitions' -- I believe were his words -- 'on the use of airpower.' Is that correct?"

"Dr. Kissinger: That is legally correct."

"Mr. Kalb: Politically and diplomatically?"

"Dr. Kissinger: We have the right to do this."

Then you have the Nixon news conference of March 15, which I believe we called to your attention before.

Q Ron,--if I could maybe suggest a context for that, it was the context that it would not violate the accords if we availed ourselves of that opportunity if we wanted to.

MR. NESSEN: Well, the question was, "There are no inhibitions on the use of air power, is that correct?" "Kissinger: That is legally correct."

Nixon, at his news conference on March 15, 1973 said, "I would only suggest that based on my actions over the past four years that the North Vietnamese should not lightly disregard such expressions of concern."

Q What date was that?

MR. NESSEN: That was Nixon's news conference of March 15, 1973.

Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs William Porter, in a speech in Grand Rapids on March 21, 1973, said, "If it continued, this infiltration could lead to serious consequences."

Elliott Richardson, you may recall, at that time was the Secretary of Defense. I would like to read you two things by Elliott Richardson from early April 1973, and then I really don't think we need to prolong this much longer because -- I have got any number of things here.

On April 2, 1973 Elliott Richardson appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Q This is as Secretary of Defense?

MR. NESSEN: Right, and he was asked this question, just to show you there is nothing new under the sun.

"Question: There are reports out of South Vietnam today" -- which is more than two years ago -- "that President Thieu of South Vietnam says the United States and the South Vietnamese government have an agreement that if there were an offensive, that if the North Vietnamese do come in, that the United States will come back with its airplanes and with its support. Do we have such an agreement?"

"Richardson: This is a question simply of very possible contingencies. I would not want to try to amplify on anything he said or to subtract from it."

Finally, to indicate to you that the public statements at the time appear in some cases to be stronger than these letters, Elliott Richardson the next day, on April 3, appeared before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, April 3, 1973.

Before he went in, some newsmen approached him and asked him a question. The question was, "Is it possible that we will have to bomb either North Vietnam or in support of the South Vietnamese Army again?"

Q The same day, right?

MR. NESSEN: The next day, April 3.

Richardson replied, "It certainly is something we cannot rule out at this time."

MORE

Q Ron, were there any public remarks by Mr. Nixon at that period which are as strong as the letters?

MR. NESSEN: Of course, these are all people who are speaking for the Administration at the time. Kissinger had a news conference on May 2nd saying, "We have made clear that we mean to have the agreement observed."

Nixon, on May 3, 1973, in his foreign policy report -- we put out these before -- "We shall be vigilant concerning violations of the agreement. North Vietnam, if it violated, would risk revived confrontation with us." That is Nixon.

Also, "We will not tolerate violations by the North Vietnamese or its allies. We have told Hanoi privately and publicly that we will not tolerate violations of the agreement."

Q Ron, can I ask a question just to establish a fact? Are these letters -- you must have seen copies of the Nixon letters -- are they genuine?

MR. NESSEN: As far as we can determine, they are.

Q Are these the letters you saw?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, there are quotes from other letters in here. Have you read the document that Mr. Hung put out?

MR. NESSEN: I only saw the two letters put out in full.

Q There are several -- January 17th he has a quote. The One point he makes in there is that there was a threat by Nixon to cut off aid if Thieu did not sign the agreement. I did not know that had come up before. He puts it usually in the form that Congress probably would refuse further aid.

MR. NESSEN: Yes. You know this is interesting for the historic record, Dick, but as far as the question we are dealing with here -- you mean, is this an authentic letter?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: It appears to be.

Q I have a question.

MR. NESSEN: But let me just say all these items are interesting for the diplomatic histories, but I do want to try to keep this focused on how this question arose in the beginning.

"Were there any secret agreements or commitments?" And I think if you read the letters and if you read what was said publicly at the time, what we said is correct, that there was nothing in substance said privately that was not said publicly.

Q But there is a question of timing here. Don't the Nixon letters to Thieu constitute a secret agreement in and of themselves?

MR. NESSEN: You mean between the time he wrote the letter and the time he said the same thing publicly?

Q The dates on the letters are prior to the quotes which you gave us. That is, the earliest quote you gave us is January 28, 1973, and that was Sullivan, and Nixon was making the assurances to Thieu in private confidential letters to Thieu in November of 1972.

MR. NESSEN: You mean the agreement was secret for two or three months?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: If there was ever an irrelevant story today, this is it.

Q Ron, isn't it relevant, though, because you told us when the issue was first raised that the extent of the President's letters was that the United States would respond vigorously and that is not --

MR. NESSEN: You are reading a wire copy story of what I said. The "responding vigorously" was in a public document.

Q The question of relevance is also important because we have the same Secretary of State who apparently was in on these private commitments and who said these private commitments did not exist.

MR. NESSEN: What private agreements?

Q The private agreements between Thieu and Nixon or Nixon to Thieu in November of 1972.

MR. NESSEN: Look, I just think, number one, this conversation today is irrelevant. Number two, the whole thrust of this is, were there any secret agreements? Clearly, there were not. Three, what we have said from the beginning and based on these letters as compared to the public statements, there were not secret commitments given in private that were not stated publicly.

Why are we toying with semantics at this very late date?

Q Ron, may I ask, all of the statements you gave us by Richardson, by Sullivan and otherwise, do not, as I read them, allude to any agreements with South Vietnam. They are unilateral statements of what the United States might be able to do under the terms of the accord. They seem to me to not go to the question of whether or not there was an agreement. Am I reading them incorrectly or are you saying that Richardson was saying, when he said that we possibly might bomb, that he was at that point saying we had told Thieu that we possibly might bomb?

MR. NESSEN: That is what I feel misses the point of all of this. This whole thing came up with a charge that some secret commitment had been made to Thieu and what I am saying is, and what we have said from the beginning is if you review the public record, you will see that nothing was promised to Thieu in private that was not said out loud.

Q These statements do not say anything about what we told Thieu we were going to do. They refer to what we might do on our own.

MR. NESSEN: I don't see the distinction.

Q The distinction is that these documents which were handed to us today by this South Vietnamese gentleman indicate that President Nixon promised full force, among the other things, to Thieu.

MR. NESSEN: And he went out in public and promised vigorous reaction. So, you know, maybe on another time he would have used "vigorous reaction" in the letter and "full force" in public. What is the difference?

Q Let me put it another way: Can you assure us that in the oral statements that were made to General Thieu by General Haig, by Vice President Agnew, by President Nixon, by Secretary Kissinger and others, that in those oral statements, there was not a definition given of what these terms "full force," et cetera, mean; that they might have been definitions which led Thieu to believe that certain actions would take place. Does your denial of this go to the oral memos of conversation, the possible cables as well as just to these written letters?

MR. NESSEN: No. This is about my fourth time around on this thing and all the questions are always the same and all the answers are always the same. The record has been reviewed and the President knows of no secret agreements. Nixon has never said there were any secret agreements. Haig says there were no secret agreements. Kissinger says there were no secret agreements. Those are your leading characters.

Q I am not asking about agreements. I am asking about oral statements. Secret agreements has a technical meaning. I am also asking if your denial goes to the full record of cables and memos of conversations?

MR. NESSEN: As far as these people who are involved go -- Haig must have been aware of what he said to Thieu, don't you think? And Kissinger must have been aware. Nixon must have been aware and all those people are on the public record.

Q They take the technical definition of what is a secret agreement? At least they have in the past.

MR. NESSEN: Anyhow, I really think we are back doing what we have done about four times.

Q Can I just ask you before you quit, I think Walter's point -- the thing that troubled me from the outset -- the timing of all this. Is there any public statement that you can cite -- and you have cited quite a few.

MR. NESSEN: You have to recall that during the Paris peace negotiations there were no public statements about this because I believe Kissinger said at the time that any public statements would upset the negotiations.

You know, if you want to write a story and say, secret promises were given and kept for three months before they were made public, I guess you have a story, Dick.

Q So far as you know, there were no similar statements?

Q By the same token, there was no agreement in November.

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q So, were the letters contingent on an agreement -- and I have not read the letters -- did the letters say, "This is what will happen? This is what we promise you if you sign"?

MR. NESSEN: You have the letters. You can read the letters yourself.

Q Is that the way you would interpret them?

Q They say, "Should you decide, as I trust you will, to go with us, you have my assurance of continued assistance in the post-settlement period and that we will respond with full force."

Q The agreement came in January and the statements started in January.

MR. NESSEN: That was January 5th, and Sullivan said there are no inhibitions on January 28th, so you have 13 days of a secret promise on your hands. That is a hell of a story.

MORE

Q Isn't one of the questions involved whether or not the President made promises here which helped the South Vietnamese to go along and sign the agreement?

MR. NESSEN: You have the letter right in front of you, Dick. After asking for it four weeks, you have it. What more can I tell you about it? You have the living words right in your hand.

Do you want me to do an annotated commentary on it?

Q No, I just want to make sure I understand that there is a distinction between what they said --

Q Ron, why didn't you tell us the letter said he was going to use full force?

MR. NESSEN: As opposed to vigorous reaction?

Q Yes. Why didn't you tell us that?

MR. NESSEN: I said the words were different, but in substance they were the same, and they are.

Q Do you mean, "full force" is the same as "vigorous reaction"?

Q You said you did not know what "vigorous reaction" meant. You said it could have meant any number of things.

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure what full force meant, either.

You have a high official of the United States saying he isn't going to rule out bombing. To me, that is more explicit than "full force." I am telling you the public statements in many ways are stronger than the private statements.

Q There is a heck of a difference between saying you are not going to rule out bombing and promising full force.

MR. NESSEN: The war happens to be over and, as you know, whatever was said publicly and privately at the time, there was an act of Congress in August of 1973, in the summer of 1973, that took care of any intention to react in a military way, which is why I say it is irrelevant.

Q Would you like to have Nixon tell what he meant by that?

MR. NESSEN: I work for the other guy.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 7:00 P.M. EDT)