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THE WHITE HOUSE

INTERVIEW OF THE PRESIDENT

BY

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LONDON SUNDAY TIMES

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BBC

DIPLOMATIC RECEPTION ROOM

11:03 A.M. EDT

MR. MACNEIL: Gerald Ford makes his first visit to Europe as President of the United States. It is an omnibus mission, a summit with NATO heads of Government, talks on the Middle East with the Egyptian President Sadat, and meetings with the Governments of Spain and Italy.

Today, Mr. Ford has invited us to the White House to discuss the issues facing the West. It is the first time an American President has met European journalists in a television program of this kind.

My fellow reporters are Henry Brandon, of the London Sunday Times; Adalbert de Segonzac, of France-Soir; Jan Reifenberg of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung; and Marino de Medici of Il Tempo of Rome, all Washington-based correspondents of long experience.

Mr. Ford's travels come at a pregnant time. He leaves an America somewhat doubtful about its world role as it absorbs the sudden, final collapse in Indochina. He faces a Western Europe hungry for reassurance, but again somewhat doubtful of America's present will and capacity to back up that reassurance.

Mr. President, we are gathered in the room from which Franklin Roosevelt delivered his famous fire-side chats to rekindle the American spirit during the great depression of the thirties. Do you see your travels to Europe as necessary to rekindle the spirit of the Atlantic Alliance?

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THE PRESIDENT: I think the trip has a perhaps broader aspect or implication.

First, I should say that the closeness between the United States and the Western European countries has a long history and an important future. The trip, as I see it, is aimed at solidifying and making more cohesive this relationship economically, diplomatically and militarily.

I also see it as an opportunity for us to take a look at the past and consult about the future, and to make our personal relationships even better.

If we approach it with that attitude or with those viewpoints, it is my opinion that we, as well as the other allies, can make substantial progress.

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QUESTION: So many commentators see the Europeans in need of some reassurance. Do you feel that is part of your mission?

THE PRESIDENT: I am sure that my presence there, and what we intend to say, and what we intend to indicate by our actions, will be very, very helpful in this regard.

QUESTION: Has your handling of the MAYAGUEZ incident, in effect, done some of that work for you by reaffirming America's will to respond when challenged?

THE PRESIDENT: I am sure that both domestically in the United States, as well as worldwide, the handling of the MAYAGUEZ incident should be a firm assurance that the United States is capable and has the will to act in emergencies, in challenges.

I think this is a clear, clear indication that we are not only strong, but we have the will and the capability of moving.

QUESTION: Mr. President, it seems to me that the handling of the MAYAGUEZ incident proved your own determined character but not necessarily the American will. It was short and it didn't need any Congressional decisions. What has weakened the credibility of the American commitments, I think in the eyes of the allies, are these restrictions and limitations that Congress has put on the Presidency. And then there is also feeling that a kind of neoisolationism is rising in Congress.

I was wondering how you would deal with this doubt in American credibility?

THE PRESIDENT: There has been a tendency during and as an outgrowth of the American engagement in Vietnam one after another limitations placed on a President by the Congress.

Now, I believe there are some new indications that indicate that Congress is taking another look and perhaps the MAYAGUEZ incident will be helpful in that regard.

There were some limitations, but we lived within them, but it was rather short and it didn't require an extensive commitment. But there are some things taking place in the Congress today that I think ought to reassure our allies that the United States, the President, the Congress and the American people, can and will work together in an extended commitment.

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Let me give you an illustration. This past week, the House of Representatives, in a very, very important vote, defeated an amendment that would have forced the withdrawal of 70,000 U.S. military personnel on a worldwide basis. And of course, that would have affected our commitment to NATO.

The vote in the House of Representatives was 311 to 95, as I recall. It was a much more favorable vote this year than the vote a year ago.

I think this is an indication that the American people are getting out from under the trauma of our problems in Vietnam. As a matter of fact, another indication, Senator Mansfield -- the Democratic leader in the United States Senate -- has always, in the past, been demanding and favoring a withdrawal of U.S. military personnel from NATO. Just the other day, he publicly stated that he was reassessing his position and wondered if it was not now the time to perhaps keep our strength there until certain other circumstances developed.

During the debate in the House of Representatives, the Democratic leader, Congressman O'Neill of Massachusetts, said this was not the time or not the place or not the number for the United States to withdraw troops from overseas.

What I am saying is, we may be entering a new era, an era that will be very visible and very substantive in showing the United States' capability and will to not only do something in a short period of time, but to stick with it.

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QUESTION: Are you taking a Congressional Delegation with you to Brussels?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I am not.

QUESTION: I was wondering whether from the European point of view -- I mean, I don't want to butt into Presidential business, it might not be very helpful for Members of Congress to explain the situation in Congress and it may also have some advantages, vice versa.

THE PRESIDENT: Let me answer this way: We have a continuous flow of Members of the Congress, Senators and Congressmen, traveling to Europe and I think it is good. They meet periodically with their counterparts in various European countries, so there is no doubt that the attitude of Congress will be well explained to heads of State and to other parliamentarians. I don't think it is necessary to take on this trip members of the House and Senate.

QUESTION: May I focus one moment on the shade of difference between the political and military type of assurances the United States can give to Europe? Europeans are concerned not as much as the link between the American security and the European security but between American security and what we may call the future of European democracies which are in trouble in some cases.

How do you look at the all-political problem from this point of view?

THE PRESIDENT: We, of course, have to be most careful that we don't involve ourselves in the internal politics of any country, European or otherwise. We, of course, hope that there is stability in any and all governments, in Europe particularly, and that the political philosophy of the party that controls the country is one that has a relationship to our own political philosophy not in a partisan way but in a philosophical way. And when we see some elements in some countries gaining ground, the Communists' element, for example, it does concern us.

I think Portugal is a good example. We, of course, were encouraged by the fine vote of Portuguese people. I think the Communist Party got only 12-1/2 percent of the vote and the non-Communist parties got the rest. But, unfortunately, that vote has not as of this time had any significant impact on those that control the government, but nevertheless we approve of the political philosophy of the people of Portugal. We are concerned with some of the elements in the government.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, could I come back to the Congressional question for a moment. Are you saying that as a result of the trends you see now in the Congress that you are no longer as you were at your press conference on April 3 frustrated by the restrictions that Congress has placed on the Chief Executive?

THE PRESIDENT: I said this was the beginning perhaps of a new era.

QUESTION: Could it lead to the Congress reversing itself on the War Powers Act?

THE PRESIDENT: I doubt that. I think the Congress felt that the War Powers Act worked reasonably well in the MAYAGUEZ incident. But there are some other limitations and restrictions imposed by Congress which I think are counter-productive or not helpful; for example, the aid cutoff to Turkey. Turkey is a fine ally in NATO. We have had over a long period of time excellent political and diplomatic relations with Turkey. I am working very hard, for example, to try and get the Congress to remove that limitation on aid to Turkey.

We had been successful in the Senate. We hope to do so in the House. But there are some others plus that that I hope we can modify or remove in order for the President to act decisively, strongly, in conjunction with the Congress, but not hamstrung by the Congress.

QUESTION: Mr. President, the Europeans have been deeply struck by a poll recently indicating that the American people would only accept military intervention to defend Canada and no other country. This seems to indicate a deep sense of isolationism or at least no isolationism and I wonder what you feel about that question, what you think of that goal and how you think you can react against that trend in your own country?

THE PRESIDENT: I am positive that that poll was an aftermath of our involvement in Vietnam. I believe that the United States, the American people, will completely live up to any international commitments that we have. That poll was taken in isolation, so to speak. It was not related to any crisis or any challenge. I think the record of the American people in the past is one that clearly indicates we will respond to a challenge, we will meet a crisis and we will live up to our commitments. The history is better than some poll taken in isolation.

QUESTION: You don't feel that there is, then, an isolationist mood in America at this stage?

THE PRESIDENT: I think there was one developing during and even to some extent after the war in Indochina or in South Vietnam, but now that we are freed of that problem, it seems to me that the American people will feel better about their relationships around the world, will want me as President, and will want the Congress as their Congress to live up to the commitments and be a part of an interdependent world in which we live today.

QUESTION: Mr. President, could we move on to the relations with the Communist world and the question of detente. It seems to many that the United States is moving into a new emphasis in its foreign policy, away from detente towards more support for the allies.

In fact, Secretary Kissinger has even used the word of the need of a new abrasive foreign policy. How would you describe the post-Vietnam foreign policy, and is it shifting away from detente?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think there is a contradiction between reaffirmation and strengthening of our relationships with our allies and a continuing of detente.

The United States, through many Administrations following World War II, has had a consistent foreign policy. It is my desire, as President, to build on this foreign policy that has been developed over the years.

It does encompass working with our allies in Europe, in the Middle East, in Africa and in Latin America, and Asia, and in other parts of the world, and I think by strengthening those relationships, it gives us a better opportunity to use detente for the purposes for which it was designed.

Detente was not aimed at solving all the problems. It was an arrangement -- and still is -- for the easing of tensions when we have a crisis.

Now, it can't solve every crisis, but it can be very helpful in some, and it can have some long-range implications; for example, SALT I and hopefully SALT II.

What I am saying is that our policy can be one of working more closely with our allies, and at the same time working, where we can, effectively with our adversaries or potential adversaries.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Secretary Kissinger has just repeated the American commitment to West Berlin. He called it, as I recall it, the acid test of detente.

The Soviet Union has recently challenged the four-power status of Berlin by raising some questions about East Berlin.

Do you think that this is helpful for detente or that this is something which goes into the general area as you just described?

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THE PRESIDENT: It would seem to me the broad description I gave can be very applicable to the problem raised involving Berlin. If the allies are strong, that will have an impact on any attitude that the Soviet Union might take, and at the same time the existence of detente gives the Soviet Union and ourselves an opportunity to work on the solution of the problem in an atmosphere with less tension.

QUESTION: Do you get the feeling in Congress that there is a certain suspicion that the Russians are getting more out of detente, as some of the leading Members of Congress have said, than the United States?

THE PRESIDENT: I think there are some Members of Congress -- and perhaps some in the United States in the nonpolitical arena -- who have the impression that the Soviet Union has been a bigger beneficiary than the United States.

I strongly disagree with that viewpoint. I think detente has had mutual benefits. I would hope that as we move ahead, the mutuality of the benefits will continue.

I don't believe that those who challenge detente and say it is onesided are accurate. I think they are completely in error.

QUESTION: May I put the question differently. Since detente is a way of looking at current affairs, do you subscribe to the argument that the United States should only do what it finds in its own interests no matter how appealing detente may look at times?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not quite clear--

QUESTION: Should the United States stick only to what it finds in its own interests, no matter how appealing detente may look?

THE PRESIDENT: Do you mean in the United States' interests vis-a-vis the Soviet Union or the United States vis-a-vis its allies and friends around the world?

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QUESTION: Also, in terms of, say, the European Security Conference, for instance, where the question has been raised as to what the usefulness of this whole exercise would be for the Europeans and the Americans without a counterpart?

THE PRESIDENT: I would hope that detente would have a broader application than only in our own self-interest. But I must say that we have to be very certain that what we do does not undercut our own security. Detente has been used on some occasions, if my memory serves me correctly, to ease tensions on a broader area than just in U.S.-Soviet Union relations.

QUESTION: Can you tell us whether the recent talk between Dr. Kissinger and Mr. Gromyko have helped to overcome some of the obstacles that you encountered on SALT?

THE PRESIDENT: They, of course, went into the status of our SALT II negotiations. I don't think I should discuss any of the details. I would simply say the talks were constructive. I think they will be helpful in the resolution of some of the negotiations that had to follow after the Vladivostok meeting last December.

QUESTION: Dr. Kissinger has said that detente should not be selective. Do you feel that from now on when there are certain problems going on peripherally of the Western world and of detente you should take the Russians to task on those subjects in a harsher way than you have done up to now in Vietnam, for example, and the help they gave to the North Vietnamese?

THE PRESIDENT: We have indicated quite clearly that we didn't approve of the supplying of Soviet arms to the North Vietnamese. We have clearly said that detente is not a fishing license in troubled waters.

I think that the implication of that statement is very clear. We intend to be very firm, but detente gives us an opportunity to be flexible and flexible in a very meaningful way.

So, it will be orchestrated to meet the precise problem that is on the agenda. We can be firm when necessary and we can be flexible when that attitude is applicable.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, on SALT I, one more question, if I may. Do you think, sir, that to solve the problems that have come up in SALT II it requires a political impetus and decision by the two leaders involved; namely, yourself and the General Secretary?

THE PRESIDENT: We found from the meeting in Vladivostok that there were certain issues that had to be solved at the very highest level, and Mr. Brezhnev and myself did do that. I suspect that as we move into the final negotiations it will be required that the General Secretary and myself make some final decisions and therefore I would hope that the preliminaries can be gotten out of the way and most of the issues can be resolved, and then the final small print, so to speak, can be resolved when Mr. Brezhnev and I meet, hopefully, this fall.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you said a moment ago, talking about detente, if the allies are strong, detente will work. A lot of commentators -- and one noted one in Newsweek this week -- see a perceptible sliding among the allies in Western Europe with the growth of pacifist spirit, a growth of Marxist philosophy in certain governments in the West and wonder and are asking whether they are not going to end up in the embrace of the Soviet Union in making an accommodation with the Soviet Union.

Do you have any slight fears as you set out for Europe that that is what is happening to the Western Alliance and you need to do something about it?

THE PRESIDENT: My impression is that the Western Alliance is very strong and there is no reason why it can't be made stronger. I have followed the recent meeting of the Secretaries of Defense, so to speak, and the report I got back was encouraging. We do have to upgrade, we do have to modernize our military capability in the Alliance and I think we will. I am convinced that in the political area that the meeting we are going to have will be helpful and beneficial in that regard.

So although I see some problems in one or more countries internally, I think basically the Alliance is strong and as long as our allies in Europe see that the United States is not going to pull out, that the United States will continue to be a strong partner, I think this will strengthen the forces favoring the Alliance in our European allies.

QUESTION: Mr. President, there are quite a number of problems in the Alliance at this stage all along the Mediterranean border -- in Portugal, in Turkey, in Greece. You say, however, that the Alliance is strong; therefore, you believe that these problems can be settled without too much difficulty?

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THE PRESIDENT: I certainly recognize the problem between Greece and Turkey involving Cyprus. It is a tragic development, unfortunate, but I am encouraged. There have been some recent talks between the foreign ministers of Greece and Turkey. There are to be both Karamanlis and Demirel in Brussels and I hope to meet with both and see if we can in any way be helpful. I think this is a solvable problem and there is a beginning of the negotiating process that hopefully will lead to a solution. We have to recognize that everything is not perfect but that does not mean we cannot solve those problems that are on our doorstep.

QUESTION: Now, Mr. President, there is another problem which is perhaps more important still which is the one of Portugal -- it is going to make, I suppose, discussions in NATO very difficult with the Portuguese Government which is dominated by the Communists. How do you feel that this can be handled? Do you think that eventually a new law or new regulation should be made so that countries who don't follow the ideology of the Western world can leave NATO or should be encouraged to leave NATO such as the pro-Communist Portuguese Government?

THE PRESIDENT: I am concerned about the Communist element and its influence in Portugal and therefore Portugal's relationship with NATO. This is a matter that I will certainly bring up when we meet in Brussels. I don't see how you can have a Communist element significant in an organization that was put together and formed for the purpose of meeting a challenge by Communist elements from the East. It does present a very serious matter and it is one that I intend to discuss while I am in Brussels.

QUESTION: Mr. President, it has been reported that when the Portuguese elections were approaching and it looked as though the Communists were going to do much better in the elections than they actually did that you were in favor by some action by the United States to reduce the possibility of their success and possibly using the CIA in some form.

Could you tell us about that?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think I ought to discuss internal matters that might have involved another country. The elections turned out very well. We had no involvement so I think I should leave it right there.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, you and your mission in Europe will be very close to Portugal. You will be stopping in the Iberian Peninsula in Madrid. Spain is one country which does not belong to the NATO community, and it does not belong to the Europe of Nine, either.

The Spanish people have been asking for a long time to be more closely associated with the collective European defense setup, and your Government perhaps has looked with even more sympathy of recent to the Spanish request.

How do you view this policy by the Spanish Government at this time?

THE PRESIDENT: The United States has had a long and friendly relationship with Spain. In 1970, we signed a friendship agreement, and in 1974 we had a Declaration of Principles that involved our relationship in many, many areas on a broad basis.

We think Spain, because of its geographical location, because of other factors, is important in the Mediterranean in Europe. We believe that somehow Spain should be eased into a greater role in the overall situation in Europe.

QUESTION: Actual membership in NATO?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not sure that is something that has to be done at the present time, but it does seem to me that Spain, for the reasons I have given, ought to be brought more closely as far as our relations in the Alliance.

QUESTION: Has the Portuguese development, Mr. President, speeded that thinking?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't believe so, consciously. It may have subjectively.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in your first speech when you became President, first important speech, you talked of Europe, you talked of Alliance, and you never mentioned the word Europe, and you were criticized for that in Europe and you still since have given the impression that for you, Europe is more the NATO organization than the community.

I would like to ask you, do you consider Europe as an entity? Do you think it should have its own independence and its own unity? What are your views on that?

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THE PRESIDENT: I do consider Europe as an entity. On the other hand, we have direct relationships with the major nations in Europe through NATO.

On the other hand, we do in the future and have in the past worked within the economic system with Europe as a whole.

For example, we have worked very closely with the International Energy Agency, which is a very important part of our efforts to avoid future problems and to develop some solutions in the field of energy.

We look upon Europe as an entity, but on the other hand, we deal in a specific way with Europe, or major nations in Europe, through our NATO Alliance.

QUESTION: How vital do you think is Britain's participation in Europe?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it is very important. I don't believe I should get involved in how the vote is going to turn out on June 5, but I think Europe is strengthened by Britain's participation.

I think our overall Western world economic strength is likewise improved and strengthened by Britain's participation.

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QUESTION: You mentioned the International Energy Organization and there is a good deal of dissatisfaction among the European governments that they have done much more in reducing the consumption of petrol than the United States has.

I know you have tried, and I was wondering now, in view of the fact that Congress did not come up with a bill, are you going to raise the import tax by another dollar?

THE PRESIDENT: I agree with you entirely. The European nations have done a much better job in reducing the consumption of petrol, or gasoline as we call it, and I admire them for it.

As President, I have tried to convince the Congress that they ought to pass a comprehensive energy program that would aim at conservation on the one hand and new sources of energy on the other.

Now, I am going to make a decision in the next 48 hours as to whether or not I will increase by \$1.00 the import levy on foreign oil. The Congress has failed very badly. They have done literally nothing affirmatively to solve our energy problem.

Perhaps the imposition of the extra dollar will stimulate the Congress to meet the problem. That is important from the point of view of not only ourselves, but the consuming nations -- those in Europe, ourselves, Japan. I am very disturbed, I might say, about Congress' lack of affirmative action.

QUESTION: The statement by the Shah that he is going to increase the price again by 25 percent has not helped you in Congress, has it?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it probably has helped us because if the price of oil is increased and we have no defense against it, it proves the need and necessity for the United States to have the kind of an energy program that I have proposed.

If we had that program in place, the one I recommended to the Congress in January, the threat of an increase in the oil price would be far less. It is the lack of action by the Congress that puts us more and more vulnerable to price increases by OPEC nations.

So, I hope this prospective, or threatened, oil price increase will get the Congress to do something such as what I have recommended. Then we would not have to worry about that.

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QUESTION: Did you try to persuade the Shah not to raise the price of oil as he is quite influential in the group of OPEC nations?

THE PRESIDENT: We talked about it. He indicated that there might be an increase. I did point out that it could have very adverse economic impacts, not only on the consuming nations, like Western Europe, the United States, Japan, but it could have very, very bad effects on the less developed nations who are more of a victim than even ourselves.

I would hope that there would be a delaying action, but in order to make ourselves less vulnerable for this one and for other threatened increases in the future, the United States has to have a strong energy program, an energy program that is integrated with that of Western Europe through the International Energy Agency. And I can assure you that we are going to keep urging and pressuring and trying to move the Congress so that we end up with a kind of a program that will preclude these increases.

QUESTION: Could I ask one other question on energy? Defense Secretary Schlesinger said in an interview this week that if there came another oil embargo the United States would not be so tolerant this time and could act, and he even mentioned military action. Could you explain what that means?

THE PRESIDENT: I would rather define our policy this way. We have scught throughout the Middle East to have a policy of cooperation rather than confrontation. We have made a tremendous effort to improve our relations with all Arab countries and we have continued our efforts to have good relations with Israel.

If we put the emphasis on cooperation rather than confrontation, then you don't think about the potentiality that was mentioned by the Secretary of Defense.

Since we do believe in cooperation, we don't consider military operations as a part of any policy planning that we have in mind.

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QUESTION: But it is a contingency not entirely ruled out if things should go wrong?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we put emphasis on cooperation, not confrontation, so we in effect rule out the other.

QUESTION: In the spirit of cooperation we are looking at the United States for leadership in the area of development of alternate sources of energy. We are particularly looking at you for obtaining a nuclear fuel -- enriched uranium, natural uranium, and, very important for us, access to technology.

What do you plan to do in this critical area for many countries of the world?

THE PRESIDENT: It is very critical. I will be making a decision in the relatively near future as to how we can move affirmatively in this area to provide adequate sources of enriched uranium. We must do it. The basic problem is whether you do it through government on the one hand or private enterprise on the other.

We will have a decision. We will get going because we cannot tolerate further delay.

QUESTION: Mr. President, there is a great concern in the world about the proliferation of nuclear matter, and the more nuclear power plants are going to be built, the more the United States is going to supply them, the more of that material will be available in the world.

I was wondering whether -- the question is the reprocessing of this material. I wonder whether it would be possible to find a multilateral way of trying to reprocess this material because there is a question of prestige with so many governments involved.

THE PRESIDENT: We are concerned about the proliferation of nuclear capability. We are trying to upgrade the safeguards when the power plants are sold or made available. We think there has to be continuous consultation on how we can do it technically and how we can do it diplomatically.

We are going to maximize our effort because if the number of nations having nuclear armaments increases significantly, the risk to the world increases, it multiplies. So this Administration will do anything technically, diplomatically or otherwise to avert the danger that you are talking about.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, the oil and energy race is intimately tied up, of course, with the Middle East. You and Secretary Kissinger have said recently that your reassessment of policy in this most explosive and dangerous area which has been going on two months is not yet complete. It is a little difficult to understand how you could have spent two months and are, as you say, meeting President Sadat next week with no new policy.

THE PRESIDENT: I think my meeting with President Sadat is a very understandable part of the process. He, of course, has a deep interest and concern in a permanent peaceful solution in the Middle East. I want to get first hand from him his analysis, his recommendations. Of course, that meeting will be followed by one with Prime Minister Rabin here on June 11 where I will have the same intimate relationship, where he can give me his analysis and his recommendations and some time shortly thereafter we will lay out what we think is the best solution.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, it has been some time since there was an authoritative statement of United States policy vis-a-vis the Middle East with reference to UN Resolution 242, which calls for secure boundaries and withdrawal from occupied territories.

Would you care to state the policy once again?

THE PRESIDENT: Of course, the United States voted for UN Resolution 242 and 339, so we do believe that within the confines of those words, any policy in the longrun has to fit, but the details, because they were quite general in many respects -- the details will be set forth in the policy statement that I will make sometime after meeting with President Sadat and Prime Minister Rabin.

QUESTION: Do you think that the question of Russian policies and overtures in the Middle East should be duly linked perhaps to other areas?

THE PRESIDENT: The Soviet Union, as a co-chairman of the Geneva Conference, obviously has an interest in and a responsibility for progress in the Middle East. I notice that they have been meeting officially, diplomatically, with representatives from Israel, and they have been meeting in the same way with many Arab nations.

I think this could be constructive, and I certainly hope it is.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Mr. Schlesinger has again stressed the possibility of using force in case of an embargo in the Middle East, and he said that if there was another embargo, the United States would not have so much patience as last time.

How do you feel about that, and in what case do you think military force could eventually be used?

THE PRESIDENT: As I said a moment ago, the policy of this Government is one of cooperation, not confrontation. And if you put the emphasis on cooperation, then you don't include within any plans you have any military operations.

I don't think I should go beyond that because everything we are doing in the Middle East -- the numerous meetings I have had with heads of states, the many consultations that Secretary Kissinger has had with Foreign Ministers -- it is all aimed in trying to, in a cooperative way, solve the problems of the Middle East, and none of those plans that we have incorporate any military operations.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, it would give us a longer perspective of history. Some of your aides believe that the West is in decline, and I was wondering whether you share that outlook?

THE PRESIDENT: I certainly do not. I think the West is in a very unique situation today. The West, so to speak, by most standards is technologically ahead of any other part of the world. The West, I think, under our system of free government, is in a position to move ahead taking the lead in freedom for people all over the world.

It seems to me that whether it is substantively or otherwise, the West could be on the brink of a leap forward, giving leadership to the rest of the world. So, I am an optimist, not a pessimist.

QUESTION: There is one aspect of the Middle East, Mr. President, which possibly concerns your visit to Europe this next week. Some of your officials have said that one of your concerns was possibly to suggest to the Alliance that it widen its sphere of attention and interest. Does that mean into the Middle East and what exactly do you have in mind?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think the Alliance, as such, ought to involve itself in the Middle East. Of course, every one of the countries in Western Europe, including the United States and Canada, have an interest in a permanent peaceful solution in the Middle East and each of the countries will have an impact, some -- for one reason or another -- more than other nations. But I don't think the Alliance should, as a unified body, move into these very delicate negotiations.

QUESTION: What is this initiative that you are reported to be considering to suggest that it does widen its sphere of attention?

THE PRESIDENT: It would be in a broad, but not substantive way. The impact of each nation, if we could all agree, whether it was done through the Alliance, would be extremely beneficial and most helpful in getting the Arab nations, as well as Israel, to resolve some of these longstanding volatile questions.

QUESTION: Do you mean asking individual members of NATO to do more in the Middle East?

THE PRESIDENT: Right, and to not officially coordinate their effort but unofficially work together.

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QUESTION: Back in NATO -- I would like to move back to Europe very briefly -- I would like to come back to your answer on your attitude towards the Common Market. I had a feeling by what you were saying that you have a slightly cool attitude towards the Common Market.

Do you still believe and support the unity of Europe in the same way as President Kennedy supported but which was less strongly supported by President Nixon? Where do you stand exactly?

THE PRESIDENT: I give full support to the Common Market, the European community efforts in trying to resolve some of the difficult economic problems. Under this Administration, under my time as President we will work together, I hope, and there have been some recent illustrations where we have been able to resolve some very sticky problems in the field of agriculture in a very constructive way.

I think this will be our attitude and I have some good evidence, I think, by recent developments that will be the attitude of the community.

QUESTION: Mr. President, are you apprehensive of European rivalry?

THE PRESIDENT: Rivalry in the broadest sense?

QUESTION: Yes, in the broadest sense.

THE PRESIDENT: I am not apprehensive because I think America is strong and we have the will and we have got the technical capability. I think we can compete with any segment of the globe and I happen to think that competition is good. I don't like to discount it but I think competition is beneficial to everybody.

QUESTION: Mr. President, could I just conclude as we come to the end of our time. Could I just conclude by asking you a quick personal question?

Since you have spent your first nine months in office cleaning up messes and reacting to things that were left on your plate as you took over the office, do you now feel yet that you have put a Ford stamp on the Presidency?

THE PRESIDENT: I think we have made a tremendous amount of progress in achieving that. Let me take two or three examples.

MORE

We have a Ford energy program developed entirely under my Administration. We have a Ford economic program which will be successful. We are making substantial headway in building on past foreign policy but as we work toward a SALT II agreement, as we work toward some of the other problem areas in foreign policy, I think you will see a Ford Administration imprimatur and therefore I am optimistic that we can see as we look back historically that before this date there was clear and convincing evidence both at home and abroad there was a Ford Administration.

QUESTION: Mr. President, thank you for talking to us. May I on behalf of my colleagues wish you a very pleasant travels to Europe, a continent of millions of whose people will have been watching this program. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: We are looking forward to it.

MR. MACNEIL: Thank you.

END

(AT 11:52 A.M. EDT)