

PRESS CONFERENCE NO. 14

of the

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

2:30 P.M. EDT

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Friday

Brussels, Belgium

THE PRESIDENT: Let me first set out the basic reasons why we welcome the United Kingdom's proposal for this meeting at the highest level and why we gave it the forte and thought it was very timely. We wanted to reaffirm the need for undiminished defense efforts and to have a general discussion of the problems associated with collective defense.

Second, we wanted an opportunity in this Atlantic forum to review the issues on what we have called the new agenda: the energy problem and its ramifications, the food problem, the interaction of national economy. We think, and we very much agree with Chancellor Schmidt and others that these problems affect the well-being and future of all of the countries of the Alliance as much as would a potential military threat.

Of course, we know that there are other international bodies to deal specifically with these problems, but we feel that this political forum is a good and suitable one in which to have a broad discussion of the approaches.

Third, we felt it timely to review the status of East-West relations, the progress of our efforts to achieve meaningful detente with countries of the East. This is particularly so because the Geneva Conference on Cooperation and Security in Europe is in its decisive phase.

Fourth and finally, there are clearly some problems within the Alliance itself. We felt it was desirable to have an opportunity to review these where appropriate to have some bilateral and private contact. Among these problems is the dispute between Greece and Turkey and the uncertain developments in Portugal which concern us.

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I have been extremely pleased with the tone and contents of the remarks that were made around the NATO table. I feel these discussions and numerous bilateral contacts -- at the King's dinner last night and the Secretary General's luncheon today and the final public statement -- fully justified this meeting.

In terms of our objectives, the common interest of all of the allies in a strong defense and in safeguarding our security by common efforts were reaffirmed, and we also recognize that there is much room for improvement in this area, including with respect to more efficient use of existing resources.

I think new emphasis has been given to the work of the military body of the Alliance. All of us came away, in my judgment, with a sense of urgency in dealing with the items on the new agenda and we were especially pleased to hear Chancellor Schmidt's review of these issues.

I think it was a good expression of political will by the allies following the recent sessions of IEA and OECD. We reaffirm the need for giving detente real meaning in terms of the values of our country. We agreed to continue the close and full consultations among allies and East-West relations as well as continue to pool our efforts in on-going negotiations like CSCE and MFR.

We face Alliance problems in a mature and a quite constructive way. I was struck by the fact that all allies stress common interest even when, as in the case of Greece and Turkey, there exists differences in particular instances. It is a measure of the general sense of satisfaction with this meeting that quite spontaneously there arose sentiment for holding these high level meetings at more regular intervals as proposed by Prime Minister Trudeau.

I would strongly support this. We can be quite flexible in the precise manner in which such meetings are prepared and held, but it is clear that there was widespread feeling among allies that contact at the highest level, the highest political level, is valuable.

Finally, I found it noteworthy that many allies stress that they did not feel a need of any special American reassurance concerning our commitment to the Alliance. They stress that they consider our commitment firm and vigorous. Their confidence is fully justified.

With that I will be glad to recognize Mr. Cormier.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, the NATO communique laid heavy emphasis on military preparedness, and I wonder if this reflects any misgivings about the future of detente?

THE PRESIDENT: I certainly did not have that impression, Mr. Cormier. The feeling was that, by strengthening our allied forces, we could be more effective in implementing the detente approach.

On the other hand, any weakening of our military forces within the Alliance could make it more difficult to proceed with detente between not only the United States and the Soviet Union, but between the East and the West, in general.

Ms. Thomas.

QUESTION: Mr. President, would you use nuclear weapons if there was a conventional attack on Europe by the Soviet Union?

THE PRESIDENT: Ms. Thomas, I don't think I should discuss military decisions at this time. I think the decision of that kind would have to be made in the proper channels. I, of course, would not expect, if our strengthening and detente prosper, that there would be any need for such a hypothetical circumstance developing.

QUESTION: Mr. President, what do you consider to be the most important achievement of your visit to Brussels?

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Smith, I think it was extremely healthy for the heads of State to get together on this occasion because there had been some difficulties, some traumatic experiences in Southeast Asia. There were rumors to the effect that the United States, because of that experience there, was retreating to an isolationist stature.

It seemed to me that it was wise, under these circumstances, for me to come here representing the United States and speak, so firmly, so unequivocally, as to our commitments to the Alliance, but, in addition, the exchange of views among the heads of State on the need for close cooperation in the economic field -- and I say "the economic field" in the broadest sense.

We recognize that the free world must have a healthy economy if we are to sustain an adequate military stature, and it is important, therefore, that we work together to move us all out of the recession that has been plaguing us for the last few months. And the exchange of views in this area, in my judgment, will be helpful in meeting this particular challenge.

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Of course, within the parameters of the economic problems, we did follow, on the IEA and the OECD, on the questions of energy and other commodities. So, those three areas, particularly, plus, I think, the meeting itself gave the people of the 15 countries a feeling that unity did exist and that we have a solidarity that would continue the blessings we had in the last 26 years.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in your interview with the five foreign journalists last week, you expressed your concern about Portugal, and I wonder if, after your meeting with the Portugal leaders, that concern has been eased or not?

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Lisagor, we had an extremely candid discussion with the Portuguese Prime Minister and his colleague. The Portuguese Prime Minister explained the goals of the political movement in his country. He explained, in some detail, the political setup as it existed and as they anticipated it would be for a period in the future.

I spoke very frankly about the concern of democratic forces in Portugal, and I particularly emphasized this because, all of us in the Alliance greeted the revolution that took place there about a year ago -- we had much hope, and we had much sympathy for the trend that had developed as a result of that revolution.

Equally, however, I did point out the contradiction that would arise if Communist elements came to dominate the political life of Portugal, and it is my judgment that others among the allies had a somewhat similar concern. There is a general agreement that the situation must be watched with care and concern, but, also, with deep sympathy and friendship of the people of Portugal.

What I said last week, I think, coincides with what I have said today. We are all hopeful, but we have to be watchful.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, after the natural revamp with Spain, what new proposals have you in mind to save the American-Spanish agreement?

THE PRESIDENT: We will be negotiating, of course, with the Spanish Government for the extension of base rights and the bilateral relationship. I don't think it is proper for me at this time to get into the details of those negotiations and the talks that will take place tomorrow.

I might, since the question was raised about Spain, indicate the situation as it developed here in the last 24 or 36 hours. As I think most of you know, I believe very strongly that the role played by Spain through its contribution to Western defense by its bilateral U.S. defense relations is an important one. The bilateral relations that the United States has with Spain, as we see it, does contribute significantly to the defense of the West.

Without speaking personally for any one of the other allies, I think this is an understood fact and hopefully, therefore, the negotiations that you speak of can be concluded successfully.

Now, if I could add one other comment vis-a-vis Spain and the allies, we, the United States, continue to favor a Spanish relationship with the Alliance. We think this is important even though we recognize the unlikelihood of it taking place in the future or the immediate future. But it is an issue that the Alliance must face and we hope that as time moves on there will be a better understanding of it and hopefully a developing relationship.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in your address to the NATO Conference, you talk about partial membership or special arrangements in the Alliance, and we all know that Greece has a special arrangement now and that France has a special arrangement now.

Could you tell us the differences as you see them between those two relationships and what ought to be done with them?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, the comment that was included in my prepared text did not refer to France's permanent relationship. The comment on the text has specific relationship to the circumstances involving Greece.

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As you know, following the Cyprus difficulties of last summer, Greece made a decision to terminate its previous relationship with the allies. It is now in a different relationship than any one of the others in the Alliance. It is a relationship, however, that we hope once the Greek-Turkish dispute is resolved over Cyprus that Greece will return to its previous status within the Alliance, and, of course, the meetings that have been held between Greece and Turkey over the last several months and the meeting that the foreign ministers of Greece and Turkey are having tomorrow, will hopefully lead to some progress in this dispute.

If that progress materializes--the dispute is settled--we are most hopeful that Greece will return to its permanent previous relationship within the Alliance.

QUESTION: Mr. President, the NATO communique refers to the need for deed in terms of the accomplishments projected for the European Security Conference, and you also have referred to that, sir. Also, we have the problem of the SALT negotiations to be concluded.

Do you think, sir, there is any risk that the timetable may be upset which could affect the meeting of the Summit Conference in Washington with Secretary Brezhnev?

THE PRESIDENT: The CSCE negotiations are reaching a point where there is some reasons for optimism. There are some points that must be resolved, but progress is being made.

I am not in a position to forecast when the final agreement will be achieved, if it is, but there is a possibility that the time schedule of several months ago might materialize, and if it does, then I think the follow-on SALT II meeting in Washington can also be on schedule. But in both cases there is no final agreement, so I hesitate to be precise as to a date in either case.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in your head-to-head talks with some of the leaders from the other nations, did you carry the ball in the discussions or did you rely on Secretary Kissinger to do most of the talking?

THE PRESIDENT: Most bilateral discussions between myself and the heads of State were carried out in the traditional fashion. In each case, the foreign minister representing the other government and Secretary Kissinger were present. They were constructive. They were, I think, a free discussion where the parties there fully participated.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, in your meetings with the full Council and the individual heads of State of Government, did there come up in the conversation the difficulties you have had in trying to get a Middle East peace settlement, and did you come away with the feeling that you would have support of the member nations in your efforts in Vienna with President Sadat and later in Washington with Rabin?

THE PRESIDENT: In almost every bilateral meeting, the question of the Middle East did come up. In each instance, we gave our reassessment procedure. We indicated that I was meeting with President Sadat in Salzburg and then subsequently meeting with Prime Minister Rabin in Washington. We pointed out the three alternatives that have been well written about. We indicated that any views or recommendations that might be made by the heads of State or the foreign ministers would be most welcome.

We did reemphasize that our objective in the Middle East peace, that we could not tolerate stagnation or a stalemate. We felt that movement was essential. And the recommendations that I do make sometime the latter part of June, early July, will be a position of movement aimed at the objective of a secure peace in the Middle East, and I think the feeling of the allies here was one of supportive of the general objectives without getting into any of the procedures or the details.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. President.

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(AT 2:51 P.M. EDT)