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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:03 P.M. EDT

April 9, 1975

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President has been meeting in his office this morning with various advisers, mostly working on the foreign policy speech for tomorrow night.

As most of you know, the President decided not to go to the Kennedy Center last night with Mrs. Ford so that he could continue to work on the speech, and other matters. He worked in his office last night from 8:05 to 10:45.

Q By himself?

MR. NESSEN: Most of the time by himself.

Q Ron, have you any idea at the moment how much time the President will take tomorrow night?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

This afternoon, we have added to the schedule a bipartisan Congressional leaders' meeting at 1:00. He will discuss with the leaders at that time some of the foreign policy issues he is going to talk about tomorrow night. I will attend the meeting and see what we can say afterward.

Q Would you possibly bring some of the leaders out here?

MR. NESSEN: I will check on that.

Q Who are the leaders?

MR. NESSEN: I have not gotten a list of attendees. I know Rhodes and Albert are in China, so they obviously won't come. I will get a list of who is participating and I will see what we can do afterward in the way of a briefing by them or me.

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Q Is Senator Jackson among them?

MR. NESSEN: If you want to take pictures or film that at the beginning, you can do that.

This morning at 10:30, the President also had another meeting that did not appear on the schedule. That was with Max Fisher. Max Fisher is a retired businessman from Michigan and a friend of the President's.

He has been on a visit to Israel, a private and personal visit, and he came in to talk to the President.

Q Did he bring any letters?

MR. NESSEN: He did not either take or bring any letters.

Q Does that mean he was not on a job for the President?

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q But he is bringing him his views?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what they talked about, Helen.

Q Did he combine both a job for the President and personal and private business?

MR. NESSEN: He did not go as an emissary of the President.

Q He was on his own?

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q Did he discuss with the President what he discussed with the Israeli leaders?

MR. NESSEN: Dick, I didn't attend the meeting.

Q Is that why the NSC meeting was delayed?

MR. NESSEN: No, there were several other things to do before the NSC meeting.

Q Ron, you said yesterday you would ask --

MR. NESSEN: I didn't get an answer for you, Les.

Q There is no answer to this?

MR. NESSEN: I said I didn't get an answer.

Q Oh, you raised the question, but didn't get an answer?

MR. NESSEN: At 2:00 this afternoon, the President is going to greet 2,000 youth delegates to the National Explorer President's Congress, who are in Washington for their annual meeting. That may be delayed a shade past 2:00, incidentally. It is scheduled for 2:00, but the Congressional leaders' meeting may run a little late.

It will be on the South Lawn, and there will be open coverage, and the President will speak briefly.

Before going out on the lawn, the President is going to meet in his office with the outgoing president of the Explorers, whose name is Miss Mary Wright, and the newly elected president who was chosen by the delegates this morning, and whose name I don't have, because he or she was just chosen.

Q What is this?

MR. NESSEN: This is the Explorer President's Congress that is going on.

Q What is the hometown of Miss Wright?

MR. NESSEN: We will check.

Q Who is doing the briefing today -- Ford, Kissinger and Schlesinger.

MR. NESSEN: Where is that, Helen?

Q At the bipartisan leaders' meeting.

MR. NESSEN: It has not been held yet, but I would assume that the President will speak for his own foreign policy.

I am sorry, I don't have a hometown on her, but we can get that for you.

Q Ron, is the NSC Meeting underway yet?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. It began at about 11:25.

Q What delayed it?

MR. NESSEN: Some other business the President was doing.

Q You can't tell us what?

MR. NESSEN: It was just other business, Fran.

Q Who was there?

MR. NESSEN: The regular attendees at the NSC meetings.

Q Any NSC staff in there?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think we normally give the list of participants of the NSC meetings.

Q Just generally, without listing the staff people, who is going over these options?

MR. NESSEN: Let me check and see. I don't know who is in there. I know the major participants.

The Prime Minister of Tunisia, His Excellency Hedi Nouria, has accepted the President's invitation to make an official visit to the United States. He will meet with the President on May 1st.

The President will host a working dinner at the White House in honor of the Prime Minister on the evening of May 1. During his visit, Prime Minister Nouria will meet with other high level officials of the Administration and Members of Congress.

This visit reflects the traditionally close and friendly relations which exist between the United States and Tunisia.

Q Doesn't that pretty well preclude any possibility of the President attending the April 29th meeting?

MR. NESSEN: I had not heard of any --

We have a couple of personnel announcements.

I think you have already been given the announcement that the President intends to nominate Alfred D. Starbird, of Alexandria, Virginia, to be Assistant Administrator of the Energy Research and Development Agency.

Q Is that General Starbird or is that another Starbird?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, it is General Starbird.

The President is announcing his intention to nominate James G. Watt, of Wheatland, Wyoming, to be a member of the Federal Power Commission. You have biographies of both of them.

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You should also have the text of a letter from the President to the Speaker of the House and the President Pro Tem of the Senate requesting a 4-year extension to the Reorganization Act of 1949.

You should have a Presidential proclamation designating May 1 as Law Day, U.S.A.

For those who are interested, we have copies you can pick up in the Press Office of the second quarterly report of the Council on Wage and Price Stability.

Q Ron, apropos of your statement to the Press Club the other night that all questions are tracked down, I was wondering if you tracked down Fran's question when she asked, what is the President's reaction to the FBI exoneration of the agents that knocked down the door in Alexandria?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't know they had been exonerated, Les.

Q That certainly is the thrust of the report of Clarence Kelley. Now, what is the President's reaction to this report of Clarence Kelley?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any reaction to give you, Les.

Q You said you were going to check on that yesterday, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: I have not had time to do it.

Q I see.

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Q Do you have any reaction to the charge of Senator Jackson?

MR. NESSEN: "Assurances to the Republic of Vietnam as to both U.S. assistance and U.S. enforcement of the Paris agreement were stated clearly and publicly by President Nixon.

"The publicly stated policy and intention of the United States government to continue to provide adequate economic and military assistance and to react vigorously to major violations of the Paris agreement reflected confidential exchanges between the Nixon administration and President Thieu at the time.

"In substance, the private exchanges do not differ from what was stated publicly. The law of 1973, of course, ruled out the possibility of American military reaction to violations of the agreement."

Now, I can give you, if you would like to see it, the publicly stated assurances at the time.

Q Whose statement is this, the President's statement?

MR. NESSEN: It is my statement.

Q What is the time that is referred to in the statement? When were the confidential agreements made?

MR. NESSEN: What confidential agreements?

Q Private, whatever you call them.

Q Confidential exchanges you said between the Nixon administration and President Thieu at the time?

MR. NESSEN: That was during the period of the negotiation of the Paris agreement.

Q Before the signing?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Can we see them?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't think so.

Q If they do not differ in substance from what was stated publicly, why can't the private communications be made public at this time?

MR. NESSEN: I think you know, Mort, that normally private communications between the heads of state are not made public.

Q Are you saying, in effect, that we did give assurances which were nullified by Congress? Is that a proper sum-up?

MR. NESSEN: The assurances that were given are on this sheet of paper that you are being handed now.

Q I mean, is that a fair statement?

MR. NESSEN: I think the statement does not need very much elaboration, Helen. It was pretty fairly stated.

Q Were these exchanges written between the two governments?

MR. NESSEN: There were a whole range of exchanges at the Embassy here, the Embassy in Saigon, various communications.

Q But were they verbal or written? Were any of them written?

MR. NESSEN: I said there were exchanges, and I think it would be fair to say both verbal and written.

Q Was Congress informed?

MR. NESSEN: Everyone has the assurances that were given because they are on this piece of paper.

Q No, was it informed that these were in writing?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, that is before my time here.

Q Why can't you ask Kissinger?

Q Have you been able to trace any background material to supplement what President Nixon might have had in mind, what he might have done on the basis of the statement that the North Vietnamese should not lightly disregard such expressions of concern with regard to a violation?

Is there any elaboration of what he might have had in mind, what action he might have taken?

MR. NESSEN: I don't really think that I can speak for what he had in mind, Ralph.

Q Ron, how can the American people be certain that the confidential written exchanges do not go beyond the subsequent statements by the President, beyond a statement by you and not even by the President, that they are substantially the same?

MR. NESSEN: Let me say this, that this statement -- even though I am issuing it -- certainly reflects the President's views.

Q Ron, would you say that these private exchanges included letters from former President Nixon to President Thieu?

MR. NESSEN: There were all ranges of exchanges.

Q Would it include that?

Q Who were they from, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: The exchanges involved various levels and various people.

Q Did they involve the Presidents of the two countries?

MR. NESSEN: There were some letters between the two Presidents.

Q Were there verbal exchanges of which there is no recording?

MR. NESSEN: Don't forget, none of us were here in those days, but my understanding is that there were various missions that went out there--publicly known missions. Dr. Kissinger went, General Haig went several times, and I assume they talked to each other.

Q Since Senator Jackson's charge and since the preparation of your statement, did you or any other office in the White House contact former President Nixon to ask him if there was anything beyond what you have stated here?

You said it was clearly and publicly stated by President Nixon. Did he give you a personal assurance?

MR. NESSEN: I have not talked to the former President.

Q Has anyone? Is there any record?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of.

Q Ron, which law of 1973 are you talking about -- Cooper-Church, which came first, or War Powers, which came after that?

MR. NESSEN: Which was the August 15?

Q Not War Powers, because that was November.

MR. NESSEN: Cooper-Church.

Q Ron, does the President plan to show or submit to Senator Jackson these confidential exchanges, which he requested in his statement?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't know that he had requested it.

Q He requested, rather, that they be made public. I am sorry.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q When did this come to the President's attention?

MR. NESSEN: What?

Q When did President Ford learn of these letters that were exchanged?

MR. NESSEN: The President a day or so after taking office was given a paper by the NSC in which all the assurances that had been given to South Vietnam were presented to him.

Q Ron, does the Administration have any reason to believe that Senator Jackson knew of these specific exchanges or some of them when he made the statement that he did yesterday?

MR. NESSEN: I have no way of knowing that, Lou.

Q You didn't answer my question. Does the President intend to make public these exchanges that Senator Jackson requested?

MR. NESSEN: The exchanges -- and there were various kinds of exchanges -- in the course of normal diplomacy are not normally made public.

Q Ron, this is not the normal situation where the Senator has requested what he called a secret agreement.

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen the request, Peter.

Q Has Senator Jackson communicated with the White House and asked specifically for the release?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Ron, these statements refer obliquely to the possibility that we might intervene militarily, but they don't, so far as I can see, state specifically that a major violation would lead to resumed United States military intervention.

At the time of the Paris accords, various people from South Vietnam, and lately the South Vietnamese Ambassador, have said that those assurances were made explicitly.

From your information, do you know that President Nixon or some other official of the Nixon administration specifically promised the South Vietnamese that we would intervene militarily with our own military equipment in the event of a major violation?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, the private confidential assurances do not differ in substance from what the public assurances were.

Q Ron, to follow that up, though --

MR. NESSEN: The law has made the whole question moot.

Q That is what I was going to say, that it seems to me here in the statement that you have issued of Mr. Nixon's statement, he says, "We will not tolerate violations."

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q In effect, we are tolerating them right now. Is this because the law has changed what the President could do?

MR. NESSEN: Doesn't the statement say that, of course. The law rules out the possibility of American military reaction?

Q I am asking if that is in fact why we are tolerating them, because of the law? In other words, there was an agreement which we can't carry out.

MR. NESSEN: The former President gave the assurances, which you see on here, as well as private ones, which are in substance the same. The law of 1973 forbids the reintroduction of American military forces.

Q Ron, you are confirming then, aren't you -- it says Nixon said that in effect that he would react vigorously to major violations, so aren't you confirming that there was some sort of tacit agreement that the United States would reintervene militarily until Congress passed the law forbidding it?

Aren't you confirming that there was in fact an agreement for American military intervention in the event of a massive violation?

MR. NESSEN: I think you have to read this, Walt. These were the public assurances, the private communications are in substance the same, and the law was passed in 1973. This is a set of facts that is incontestable.

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Q Ron, what did the President mean when he said, "would not tolerate"? What did he convey to the South Vietnamese he meant by that?

MR. NESSEN: I suppose you need to ask him, Fran.

Q Ron, wait. Let's get back. I want to ask a question on this very point.

Now, you have given us a piece of paper with some language by the former President of the United States which is not specific at all. The actions of the United States government, as you know, can vary from a stern note; they can vary from public statements by a President; they could vary to sending a fleet in; they can vary to sending B-52 bombers over.

What we are asking, and I think what we need to know in light of the fact that you have now said that these communications are in substance the same as the piece of paper you gave us, were they any more specific? Did it list any particular, at any time, military option? I think we need to know that.

MR. NESSEN: They were, in substance, the same as the public statements.

Q Have you read them?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, that is not answering the question.

Q Ron, were some of the assurances made privately by President Nixon subsequently neutralized or negated by the Congressional action?

MR. NESSEN: I think the statement says that, does it not?

Q No.

Q Not quite.

MR. NESSEN: Let me hear the question again.

Q Some of the private assurances that President Nixon, or other members of the Administration, at that time made to President Thieu or other South Vietnamese officials, were some of those assurances neutralized or negated by Congressional action?

MR. NESSEN: Well, there were two assurances given, both publicly and privately. One, continued economic and military aid; two, what he called vigorous -- whatever it is, whatever the expression is.

Q Vigorous reactions.

MR. NESSEN: -- vigorous reaction to any violations.

Now, the law of August, 1973, ruled out any American military reaction to any violation.

Q But you have not answered the question of whether the assurances included that. I mean "vigorous reaction" could be a tough Presidential statement. I think you need to be more specific here.

MR. NESSEN: The private assurances are the same in substance as the public (assurances).

Q The private assurances contain only that kind of language, "vigorous reaction," or did it spell out more specifically what the United States might do?

MR. NESSEN: The private assurances were the same in substance, Tom.

Q Ron, the transcript will tell us as soon as it is out, but I think you just said that the Congressional action did in fact negate vigorous reaction.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, it certainly -- no, I hope I didn't say that because I didn't mean to say that.

Q The statement says that, does it not?

MR. NESSEN: The law of 1973 ruled out the possibility of American military reaction to any violations of the cease-fire.

Q You are not equating vigorous reaction with military reaction?

MR. NESSEN: I mean that is a fact what the law did, Steve.

Q Ron, without going into the question of what this says right here, how do you respond simply to the simple question: Was military intervention promised?

MR. NESSEN: Whatever was promised in these public statements was in substance the same as what was promised or assured in private communications.

Q Why do you say "in substance"? I mean, you understand that the term "in substance" includes what was specifically agreed to and it is an important question, whether vigorous reaction in the public statement is the same as military intervention in the private statement. I mean, it is a very important point and I don't see why you cannot address it.

MR. NESSEN: I don't see that it is all that important a point, Mort. For one thing, the whole thing is moot. Secondly, I have read some of the communications and while the wording is different, the substance is the same.

Q In other words, Ron, what you are saying in this thing right here is, in substance, the private exchanges do not differ from what was stated publicly, and what that means is that Senator Jackson is incorrect in his charge about secret agreements? Is that what you are saying or not?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't hear myself say that.

Q Well, I mean, are we to draw this conclusion? You are making a statement. You are denying Senator Jackson, or what, Ron, because this was raised yesterday and you said you would ask.

MR. NESSEN: I would not tell you what conclusions to draw from that.

Q Ron, you were saying that the law made this moot. The Vietnam War is not a normal thing. It is something which the American people have been aggitated on for a very long time.

If, in fact, whatever agreement we have made has been made moot by that law, why can't you dispel this sort of doubt that is here by telling is a little bit about those private agreements beyond saying that they are in substance the same as the public ones?

MR. NESSEN: What more can I tell you, Lou?

Q You can tell us whether military action was specifically promised in those private agreements.

MR. NESSEN: I think I am going to stay with the statement, which is that the --

Q Well, Ron, can you say that military action was definitely excluded in the private statements?

MR. NESSEN: I think I am just going to say that in substance, the private and public communications were the same.

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Q Ron, look, the South Vietnamese are now accusing us of going back on a specific commitment that we made; namely, to use military force in the event of a major violation.

Now, are the South Vietnamese correct or are they incorrect in making that charge?

MR. NESSEN: I am just going to stick to the public statements and the statement that the private communications do not differ in substance.

Q Ron, was the initial agreement between the U.S. government and the South Vietnamese government both in what was written and including what the Secretary of State has called moral obligation, narrow assurances given or inferences given that the U.S. had an open option on what it meant by vigorous reaction, but that the Congressional action of 1973 eliminated the military from this inference?

MR. NESSEN: I don't get the thrust of your question.

Q The gist of it is that the United States left its options open, what it would interpret as vigorous reaction, in case of North Vietnamese major violation and in this sense that Saigon was given to understand the United States had a wide range of options and, therefore, agreed to the Paris agreement and later Congress curtailed the power of the Administration to interpret the reaction. Is that what happened?

MR. NESSEN: I still don't understand what you are driving at, but I really do need to emphasize that -- I mean, the point of it all is that what you have here in the way of public statements and what was said in private communications do not differ in their substance.

Q Then you are saying that it was deliberately or diplomatically vague, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Pardon?

Q You are saying that it was deliberately vague, imprecise as to what the reaction would be, because that is what this is.

MR. NESSEN: I just don't have any idea what the intention was when those statements were written.

Q Ron, has General Haig been asked to detail the verbal communications that he carried back and forth, specifically whether he gave any interpretation to what the statement of not tolerating violations means?

MR. NESSEN: Secretary Kissinger, who was here at the time, has filled in the verbal communications that he recalls being given.

Q Ron, was Saigon given to understand that to react vigorously could conceivably include U.S. military action? There must be some records in the U.S. government of the power of conversation between the government people here and the people in Saigon and the State Department negotiators in Paris and so on.

This, "to react vigorously," at the time that it was given, did this include the possibility of military action by the United States?

MR. NESSEN: Dick, I think we just have to stick with the words as they were given.

Q Ron, right here in this public statement, isn't this diplomatic language which would suggest military action? He says, "I would only suggest that based on my actions over the past four years that the North Vietnamese should not" --

MR. NESSEN: That is why I say there is no difference in substance between what is stated here and what is said in the private communications, and that is why I cannot understand the --

Q Ron, why did you say private communications if it is all the same?

MR. NESSEN: They go on all the time, as you know, Peter. In the normal course of things, there are private communications I suppose virtually every day between nations.

Q Are you saying to us, Ron, that the reason that the private communications were not held to add something to this, that the purpose of the private exchanges were not to add some other dimension or some additional material to these things we have here? Is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: I would say that the words of the private communication are different.

Q Are different?

MR. NESSEN: Are different, yes. I mean, they use different words.

Q Are they more specific?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I can characterize them that way. The words are different in the private communications, but the end result is that the two assurances were given privately that were given publicly -- economic and military assistance, one and two, a vigorous reaction to any violation of the agreement.

Q Ron, since the North Vietnamese began this year's spring offensive, have we lived up to that part of the agreement, and if so, what have we done?

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry. I didn't hear the first part of your question.

Q What has been our "vigorous reaction" since the North Vietnamese moved two more divisions down to the South, put 3,500 men on the border, increased their infiltration and attacked Bon Me Thuot and all those good things? What has been our vigorous reaction?

MR. NESSEN: I think I know what you are driving at, and I think you know the answer, Steve. The law of 1973 forbids the reintroduction of any American military forces.

Q Will you describe the January note that we referred to here a couple of weeks ago as a vigorous reaction?

MR. NESSEN: Again, I don't know what you are driving at, Steve, but that certainly was an effort by the United States to urge the other nations of the Paris peace accords, to persuade North Vietnam --

Q That is a very serious thing. A government that is a friend of ours has accused us of renegeing on a very serious commitment, and you are not denying it?

You are neither confirming nor denying in the State Department parlance, and that is kind of a serious situation. I wonder if you can clarify that.

MR. NESSEN: I can't, beyond what I have said, Steve.

Q Since you, yourself, have again emphasized that the possibility of military force is barred, would he want to use military force if he still had the authority to do it?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is probably the same question we got in Palm Springs. I think you were there, weren't you?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: I thought I said the President had neither the inclination nor the authority to do it. I thought that was brought up out there.

Helen?

Q Aside from the fact that President Thieu can read newspapers, were there any exchanges after the law was passed which would say that all bets were off? I mean, was Thieu then told that previous promises were no longer on the books even though he knows Congressional action would nullify it?

MR. NESSEN: I am not familiar with all the communications that went on over the years. I did take a look at the ones that involved this particular period.

Q Ron, your statement says that the United States government promised to continue to provide adequate economic and military assistance. Do either the public statements or the private assurances say this is anything beyond military aid? Do either of them imply use of United States military force, manpower, planes or ships in that area?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think you have mixed up the two assurances, Ted. One was for economic and military aid and the other was for a vigorous American reaction to any violation of the Paris accords by the other side.

Q Ron, when you say "assistance," this President's statement referring to assistance --

MR. NESSEN: In this particular instance --

Q -- means arms, not men? Is that right?

MR. NESSEN: "To continue to provide adequate economic and military assistance" refers not to any American military intervention.

Q Ron, could you please give me some guidance, just a yes or no answer. Would we be wrong to conclude, judging by the language of the Nixon promises, that vigorous reactions in the private conversations meant American military force? Would we be wrong to conclude that the private actions meant that, that the private communications -- referring to vigorous reactions -- mean American military force?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to tell you what conclusions to reach.

Q Ron, on the other part of the agreement, were there any specific levels of military and economic aid provided for in the private communications?

MR. NESSEN: No.

You mean numbers?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Now, the agreement provides for one-for-one replacement of used up or worn out military supplies.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Did the commitment on the part of the United States go beyond that at all?

MR. NESSEN: In the private communications?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: The commitment for aid?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, is President Ford confident that he was shown all there was to see when he was shown these private assurances?

MR. NESSEN: So far as he knows.

Q Ron, you said you have read some of the communications. Can you tell us, did you select these? Were they given to you? You are indicating that you have not read all of them.

MR. NESSEN: I said I did not read all of the communications that went back and forth over the years. I read the ones that I thought were pertinent.

Q Ron, are you specifically denying that we promised the South Vietnamese military aid?

MR. NESSEN: What do you mean, military aid? Do you mean supplies?

Q You said "vigorous reaction" covered military aid. Are you denying this?

MR. NESSEN: All I am saying is that --

Q Military intervention as part of vigorous reaction in case of massive violations of the Paris agreement. Are you specifically denying that this did not exist --

MR. NESSEN: I am saying that the wording in the private communications was different, but that in substance, it added up to the same thing, that there were two assurances given -- one for economic and military supplies; and secondly, a vigorous reaction to any violation.

Q Are you denying that "vigorous reaction" included military intervention and help, if needed?

MR. NESSEN: I think I will stay with what I said.

Q Ron, can you tell us why the President does not have the inclination to use any military force in this situation?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that I can answer that, Phil. You probably ought to ask him at the next news conference.

Q Ron, I want to get back to the statement that you have issued and answered later. You said that the whole question of nuances here is really moot because of the action that Congress took. The fact is that the President who gave the assurances signed that bill, he did not veto it, number one.

Secondly, during the debate on the floor in the Congress, do you recall at any time that the Secretary of State or the President of the United States said that this legislation, if enacted, would cause the U.S. to renege on a commitment made privately?

MR. NESSEN: I am not familiar with the entire debate, Jim, but I believe if I recall the debate correctly, there was some indication from the White House that -- I tell you, it is on the record, Jim, because I have the record here in front of me. I just don't think it is proper for me to explain what the motives or actions of the previous administration might have been.

Q Where should we look for the record?

MR. NESSEN: You cannot find it in the record?

Q The point is, here in connection with what you are saying today; the point is that the action of the Congress did not make moot what private assurances may have been made in the way of military action because it was the action of the President which made this the law.

MR. NESSEN: Well --

Q Is that not true? I mean, answer the question.

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure that I said anything about Congress doing anything. I say the point is moot, which you would have to agree with.

Q Ron, can you tell us, from your study of these private exchanges, whether the South Vietnamese interpreted those exchanges to mean that vigorous reaction would mean the use of military force, intervention?

MR. NESSEN: I have no way of knowing what the South Vietnamese concluded.

Q Well, would you read both sides?

MR. NESSEN: I read one side.

Q Just one side?

Q Are you surprised that the South Vietnamese take the position that they are taking?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what position they took.

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Q How about the wire report? I seem to recall this morning that General Brown had been discussing bombing as an option. Is this included in the vigorous business or what? Does the President have any reaction to this report?

MR. NESSEN: I say that the President has no inclination or authority to reintroduce American military force.

Q And that applies?

MR. NESSEN: I have something here that I can give you.

Is anybody filing?

Q We are happy to listen to anything you have to say.

MR. NESSEN: The President is gratified that the House Budget Committee has taken the initiative to set a ceiling on government spending for fiscal year 1976, even though it is not required by law until next year.

He is gratified by what they have done so far, although he thinks the ceiling figure they have picked is too high. He also feels that he would like the Budget Committee to go further, rather than setting an overall budget ceiling, to go beyond that and set recommended amounts for major program categories -- farm, HEW, defense and so forth.

The President hopes that the establishment of the Budget Committee would instill a new sense of responsibility for the total Federal spending, and the President sees this hope as having a chance of fulfillment by the fact that the Budget Committee has adopted his proposal for a 5 percent ceiling on Federal pay increases and a ceiling somewhat higher than his of, 7 percent on the increases in other programs tied to the cost of living.

As we have mentioned before, if the spending proposals that are already underway in Congress were all passed, the budget deficit would go to possibly \$100 billion and the total spending would be \$380 billion to \$400 billion.

The House Budget Committee resolution goes to the floor of the House for final action, and the President hopes that at that time the full membership would modify the figure and lower it to his upper limit, which he believes is \$60 billion on the deficit.

Q Ron, one very quick question on that. You make it sound like they did this in reaction to the President's request, but they had been planning to set the ceiling for weeks.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END (AT 12:45 P.M. EDT)