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NEWS CONFERENCE

#188

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:58 A.M. EDT

APRIL 14, 1975

MONDAY

MR. NESSEN: You have today's schedule and pools.

After meeting with various staff members this morning, the President met with the American Ambassadors to Egypt, Jordan, Israel and Syria. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Middle East situation with the Ambassadors in the four key countries of that area. This is part of the policy reassessment of the Middle East, which you know about.

The President is also going to thank the Ambassadors during this meeting for the roles they have played in American policy in the Middle East.

Q Ron, on that, normally we have a chance to get a picture of them arriving, or something. Where did they come in, and is there going to be a chance to talk to them as they leave?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know where they came in, and I don't know whether you will have a chance to talk to them.

Q Can you tell us if any of the Ambassadors urged that there be no pictures with them with their counterparts? Does the Israeli Ambassador have objections to having pictures with the Egyptian Ambassador?.

MR. NESSEN: These are all American Ambassadors. Do you mean, would the Ambassador of Israel be embarrassed to be seen with the Ambassador of Egypt?

Q I withdraw the question.

Q Why was the picture cancelled? It was on.

MR. NESSEN: There was no cancellation of a picture. It was a working meeting and there was just no picture.

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Q Is the President going to, or has he, explained to you how Israel could be more flexible?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q To repeat that question that you were going to ask him about, any answer on that? Is there any?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Is there any end?

MR. NESSEN: There is no end, Helen. (Laughter)

Q Is the reassessment nearing an end?

MR. NESSEN: I think I mentioned the total time for the reassessment was to be four to six weeks. I forget when it was started. I guess it was at the time of the suspension of the Kissinger talks, so back-date it from there four to six weeks.

Q In view of the Israeli Foreign Minister's statement before he left for the United States, that he would welcome Secretary Kissinger back, can that reassessment be pushed back some?

MR. NESSEN: You mean postponed?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: No, it is going ahead.

Q Did Secretary Kissinger sit in on this meeting this morning or is he in there now?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, can you address yourself further to Ralph Harris' question, since it was announced there would be a pool and cameramen, what is the thinking in your area that such a plan is cancelled?

MR. NESSEN: It wasn't cancelled. There was no cancellation. These things are made up ahead of time and the decision was there would be no pictures because it was a working meeting.

Q We like working things. We don't want just the ceremonials. Oftentimes you get a good story out of working meetings, sometimes.

Q Before we get off this, is this some new policy or how often will this be done?

MR. NESSEN: How often will what be done, Jim?

Q Not having pictures of working meetings.

MR. NESSEN: AS you know, the President has a number of meetings every day, some of which are photographed and some of which are not.

Q What is the criteria? You also cancelled John Denver so we won't think you are playing favorites.

MR. NESSEN: It was simply decided that the President wanted to get right on with the business of the meeting with the ambassadors.

Q Ron, may I ask a question about the reassessment? When it is completed, do you anticipate a formal statement of principles or goals or objectives, or will the reassessment simply be woven into current policy that is now going on without any formal announcement?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the procedure will be for making known the results of the reassessment at this time.

Q Ron, won't the results be partially known when the Administration decides how much aid to recommend for Israel?

MR. NESSEN: I think the President indicated that that was one of the matters, the whole question -- well, it is covered by the fact that the President said that all aspects of policy in the Middle East were being reassessed.

Q Will the President meet with Allon this week?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard.

Q Is there any plan to send Kissinger back to the Middle East?

MR. NESSEN: Specifically no plan, but as you know, the talks are in suspension and the way it has been left is that if the two sides agree that is the way they wish to proceed, that we would do what we could to help.

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Q Is there a meeting scheduled with Abba Eban?

MR. NESSEN: Do you mean with the President?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: I haven't heard of any.

Q When will the Ambassadors be going back?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. You will have to ask the State Department.

Q Ron, as long as we are on this subject, the President repeated in his foreign policy speech the fact that the United States was willing to go to Geneva in principle, but repeated that we were exploring other avenues.

Where does the Geneva conference stand as far as the United States is concerned at this time? Do you still anticipate it is going to be reconvened or have these other avenues proved to be productive enough so that there is now some question about the Geneva conference or what can you tell us?

MR. NESSEN: Nothing more than what the President said the other night.

Q You know of no change in the situation at all?

MR. NESSEN: Not since he made that speech.

Q Have you had the formal communication from the Soviet Union that was talked about even before the speech? Do you have that exchange with the Soviet Union as to the reconvening?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure, Jim. You need to check with the State Department on that.

At 12:30 the President is going to participate in the swearing-in ceremony for the members of the Federal Election Commission, who were confirmed by Congress last week. That will be in the Rose Garden, and it will be open coverage for those of you who wish to attend.

The six members being sworn in today are Joan D. Aikens, Robert Tiernan, Vernon Thomson, Tom Curtis, Neil Staebler and Thomas Harris. There are ex officio members; namely, the Clerk of the House, W. Pat Jennings, and the Secretary of the Senate, Frank Valeo. The President will speak at the ceremony.

At 12:45 the President will have a courtesy call from the singer John Denver.

At 2:00 the President will meet with the Board of Directors of the Association of American Railroads. The other participants are Secretary Coleman, Director Lynn and Jim Cannon. The Association requested this meeting to brief the President on the condition of American railroads.

At 5:00 the President will meet with Senator Robert Dole and Republican Members of the Senate Agriculture and Forestry Committee and the House Agriculture Committee. The meeting is at the request of the Members, and the purpose is to discuss the farm bill, which is before the conferees at the moment.

At 6:00 this evening the President will greet the new members of the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year in the East Room. The President will speak briefly and then will have a reception for the 35 members in the State Dining Room. There will be open coverage of the President's remarks.

Q Why not of the reception? I mean, this is very important -- this rapport with the women. We have covered these receptions before, and suddenly there seems to be a real clamp down. It is a public reception. It is not being paid for by the President out of his pocket.

MR. NESSEN: I can't recall when there was open coverage of this thing.

Q Oh, yes, we have been here long enough to know that that kind of reception would be. It is very important to see the President with these women, and the conversations afterward and so forth.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, I don't recall any reception that has been open to coverage since I have been here.

Q Why not? What is the reason?

MR. NESSEN: The last two members of the commission --

Q Does that mean you have no answer?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, there has not been traditionally coverage of the receptions.

Q Come on, Ron, some of us have been around here and we know there has been coverage of these receptions. Even the women are calling us up and saying you all are surely coming, we want you to be there tonight.

Q And then they called back and say, "No, you can't go."

MR. NESSEN: Let me check it for you after the briefing.

Q They will let us in eventually. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: The last two members of the commission are being named today. This brings the total to 35. They are actress Katharine Hepburn and the actor Alan Alda.

Q Will they be at the reception?

MR. NESSEN: So far as I know.

Tomorrow, as we mentioned last week, the President will be speaking to the 84th Continental Congress of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution at Constitution Hall. That is at 11:30.

Q Will there be a text?

MR. NESSEN: We will get you a text when it is finished.

Q Any chance we can get it today for at least the evening papers tomorrow, at 6 a.m.?

MR. NESSEN: We will make the effort.

Q Do you have a subject -- foreign policy or domestic? Do you have any idea?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is likely to be defense policy. They have a fairly small press area over there, I am told. The President's remarks, therefore, will be piped back here from Constitution Hall, and we will delay the briefing until the pool has returned from Constitution Hall, which should be shortly after noon.

If you don't absolutely feel it is essential to go, you could stay here and hear it piped in.

Q When you say "piped back," do you mean just on the house speaker or through the house mult?

MR. NESSEN: The mult.

Q And speaker?

MR. NESSEN: And speaker.

Q Ron, again, why this attitude? We went last year. There is plenty of room over there. There are very few press over there.

MR. NESSEN: Go right ahead, Sarah.

Q But why are you telling us there is very little room over there and people should stay here and wait and have it piped over and all that?

MR. NESSEN: I have no problem if you go.

Q I know you don't, but why do you have all these arrangements of piping in when we went last year?

MR. NESSEN: Would you rather not have it piped in?

Q I don't mind what you do. It is nice to have it piped in, too, for those who do not go, but you made the statement there is very little room over there.

MR. NESSEN: That is what I am told.

Q Ron, speaking of International Women's Year, I would like to ask one question. It appeared twice in the Star yesterday. Dianne Brockett, I believe it is, is the Education Editor of the Star, was assigned to cover a meeting of the African Heritage Association at the Shorham-Americana. She was rejected and she was excluded from this meeting and was told it is "because you are white."

Now, I have already contacted HEW and they are looking into it. I would like to know what is the President's feeling about a white reporter being excluded from covering a meeting in the Nation's Capital?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of the episode, Les, until you mentioned it to me.

Q Could you check and give us the facts?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Thank you.

Q Have you finished your announcements?

MR. NESSEN: Not quite.

Tomorrow evening, the President will attend the annual Republican Senate-House dinner in the ballroom of the Washington Hilton Hotel. The President will leave the White House at about 8:00 and speak over there at about 10:00, after dinner. There will, of course, be open coverage. I don't think there is any room problem.

Q Will there be a text?

MR. NESSEN: We will pursue the text and find out whether we can get it in time.

Wednesday, the President plans --

Q Ron, you have not decided whether there will be an advance text on that?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't know whether it will be done in time for it to be passed out.

On Wednesday, the President will attend the 52nd annual convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors at the Shoreham. The President will be leaving the White House at about 12:30, attend a luncheon and then at about 1:25, he will speak briefly and then will submit to questions for about a half hour, or so, by a panel made up by the ASNE. This, of course, is open coverage, live coverage, if you want it.

Q That is at 1:25 Wednesday?

MR. NESSEN: The event, the speaking and questioning part begins at about 1:25.

Q Where is that, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: At the Shoreham Hotel.

Q Will you brief on that day?

MR. NESSEN: Probably not.

Q Will that panel consist only of members of that organization?

MR. NESSEN: I believe that is right, yes.

Q Do you have any idea when you will have a text on that or not?

MR. NESSEN: There will be very brief remarks and I suspect they will be off-the-cuff remarks.

Q Can we get a transcript?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I think we will do that.

The panel is made up of Scotty Reston of The New York Times; Clayton Kirkpatrick of The Chicago Tribune; Ed Cony of The Wall Street Journal; Ron Funk of the Santa Monica Outlook; Ed Miller, the editor of -- I don't know what the name of it is -- it is in Allentown, Pennsylvania; and Norman Isaacs of the Wilmington News Journal.

Q No one but those people will be allowed to ask questions?

MR. NESSEN: That is my understanding.

Q Are they taking questions from the group before?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is they will collect questions from the other editors and relay those questions to the President.

Wednesday evening, the President plans to drop in at the 54th annual White House News Photographers Association Awards dinner at the Sheraton Park Hotel. I don't have any more details of that at the moment.

Q What time is that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the details, but I will get them for you.

Q Is there a speech there?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that, either.

I think you have some announcements that we put out, including the proclamation by the President of the week beginning May 25 as Small Business Week, and some other personnel appointments.

We also have in the Press Office, for those of you who care to see it, copies of a letter the President has sent to the Speaker of the House and the President Pro Tem of the Senate on the Cambodian evacuation. This letter is required by the War Powers Act.

Q Ron, can you go on through the rest of the week as you have gone through as far as Wednesday?

Q Is there a reception for those ASNE members at the White House Wednesday evening?

MR. NESSEN: I believe that has been scheduled.

Q That is still on?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Is that open coverage?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to check, Sarah.

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Q What about weekend travel?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything further. I think we announced a trip to New Hampshire on Friday.

Q We have heard that is an overnight. Can you tell us whether that will be an overnight?

MR. NESSEN: I think we will have further details of the trip probably tomorrow.

Q I have another housekeeping question. There was some thought that the Weyand report would be released over the weekend. I was wondering if perhaps you could tell us definitely whether it is going to be released, and when?

MR. NESSEN: I don't anticipate that it will be released.

Q At any time?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Why not?

MR. NESSEN: General Weyand, I understand, is going to be testifying on the Hill, and at that time will go through the major points of his report to the President.

Q Do you know when that will be?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have that schedule.

Q That will be in open testimony?

MR. NESSEN: I assume so. I don't know the details of his testimony.

Q Is that not a change in attitude of the White House? Weren't you saying last week the report would be released?

MR. NESSEN: I said it was possible.

Q Weren't you more definite than just possible?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q General Weyand has just given a private briefing on the Hill to the people. Why is he suddenly going to repeat it openly?

MR. NESSEN: I think he was invited to, Sarah.

Q Invited to do it publicly or privately?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. You need to check with the committees up there to find out.

Q If he has just done it privately, I am curious to know why all of a sudden they are going to let him -- if they are -- I wonder if maybe what you are referring to is what he has just done privately.

MR. NESSEN: No, I think he will be testifying up there, but you need to check with the committees to find out which ones and whether it will be open or not.

Q The only reason you are not releasing it is because he will appear on Capitol Hill. Is that the only reason?

MR. NESSEN: I think another reason would be fair to say is that when Secretary Kissinger said the report might be made public, he indicated there might be a sanitized version made public, and by deleting the sections it was felt necessary to delete, the remainder of the report could possibly be misleading, so it was decided not to put it out from here.

Q In what way misleading?

MR. NESSEN: I think I will leave it at that, Ralph.

Q Could I ask a question about Thursday's schedule? There have been published reports that he is going to Ford's Theater that night. Is he?

MR. NESSEN: I will announce the schedule later in the week. I think there will be some other events later in the week, and as soon as they are firm, we will announce them.

Q Is the Senate Foreign Relations Committee coming here to see the President this afternoon? They seem to think they are?

MR. NESSEN: There has been some conversation here this morning about that, and I don't have a definite answer on whether they are coming or, if so, at what time.

Q Do you know what the subject will be?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is some committee Members requested the meeting to discuss Vietnam developments.

Q Was it decided not to release the Weyand report because there was anything in there which would be embarrassing to the Administration? Did that figure into it at all?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q I have two questions on Vietnam. One, is the President prepared to turn over the documents between Thieu and Nixon in the aftermath of last week's Jackson committee; and two, has the President signed a document or an order, as Newsweek says, to put the evacuation plans into motion?

MR. NESSEN: In answer to your first question, the letter from Senator Sparkman has been received, and it is being studied, and it will be responded to.

The answer to the second question is no.

Q What was the second question?

MR. NESSEN: Had the President signed an order for the evacuation of the South Vietnamese?

Q Do you expect a response on the Thieu letters, the Nixon letters, today?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any idea what the timing will be.

Q Has the President given a verbal okay for what Newsweek was talking about?

MR. NESSEN: Not as far as I am aware.

Q Did the President review the contingency plans for evacuation in detail, or did he review them at all while in Palm Springs?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Jim.

Q The Marines who evacuated the American Embassy personnel from Phnom Penh also evacuated Cambodians in the same helicopters, and under the same security. Does the President feel he has the authority now to evacuate the South Vietnamese under the War Powers Act using the same forces?

MR. NESSEN: The situation in Cambodia was that that evacuation was arranged under what the President believes to be the inherent power of the President to protect American lives. At the same time, some few Cambodians were taken out as part of the same operation.

Given the kind of numbers that are being talked about publicly in Vietnam, if that should ever happen, it is obvious that that would have to be a much bigger and separate operation, if it ever came about. That is why he asked to have the law clarified as to his authority.

Q Ron, if this is part of his inherent powers to save American lives, why must he explain to the Speaker and the President Pro Tem for the presence of armed Americans?

MR. NESSEN: It is required by the War Powers Act.

Q Even if he has the inherent power under the Constitution?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q How many Americans are now in South Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: The last number I saw was something like 5,500 to 6,000 but, as we said the other day, the people are being thinned out. A number of dependents and people whose jobs don't require them to stay there are leaving.

Q Ron, on that subject, the Pentagon this morning said about 5,000 are there, and some of the people who have come back said they were ordered out as orphan escorts, and when they got on the plane, they found no one there except other Americans.

They, according to a spokesman, said apparently the evacuation is going on. Do you have any comment on that?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Is there an evacuation going on?

MR. NESSEN: I say the number of Americans who are dependents or whose jobs no longer require them to be there are leaving.

Q Ron, has the President been at all disturbed by -- and has he asked anyone to look into -- these reports of various misuses of the so-called orphan evacuation?

MR. NESSEN: He is aware of the reports, John, and it is a matter that Mr. Parker at the State Department, who is overseeing all the humanitarian efforts, should address.

Q You said people who are no longer needed in Saigon, they are being moved out. How exactly is that being defined? That definition could be used to cut the Embassy down to just five people, saying some functions are no longer needed. Could you elaborate on what the definition is?

MR. NESSEN: As you know, there were some Americans assigned to Military Regions 1 and 2. Obviously, those people's jobs are no longer there, and so they are leaving.

I do want to straighten out one thing I said before concerning -- I think in answer to Saul's question -- why was it felt necessary to write to the Senate and House on the Cambodian evacuation, and I said it was required by the War Powers Act.

I think it would be more accurate to say that it was the President keeping Congress informed as to what he is doing. I think the lawyers here at least see that as a fuzzy area, whether it is required or not required.

As in the case with the Durham last week or the week before, and now with this, he wants to keep Congress informed without directly addressing the question of whether it is required. In fact, in the letter, which you will see copies of, if you want, the President said, "In accordance with my desire that the Congress be fully informed on this matter and taking note of Section 4 of the War Powers resolution."

This was similar to the wording in the letter that he sent with respect to the Durham episode.

Q Except that the Durham evacuated nationals of Vietnam rather than Americans.

MR. NESSEN: The question is not what they were doing, but where they were. They were in South Vietnamese territorial waters, and in this case, they were in Cambodia to do that evacuation.

Q The President has asked for authority, for clarification of various laws, regarding his ability to introduce American troops to take Americans out of Vietnam. In view of what happened in Cambodia, he clearly doesn't think that is necessary, so why is he asking Congress for authority to do so in the case of Vietnam? I am talking only now of the Americans, not the South Vietnamese.

MR. NESSEN: In the case of Cambodia, there was not time to wait for the clarification, and he does believe he has the inherent power.

Q If he thinks he has the inherent power, why bother to ask for a clarification in the case of the Americans in regard to Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: Because he wants to deal and consult with Congress.

Q You are shifting around a little. You first said it was just taking Cambodians with Americans. Now you are saying he didn't have time to ask for permission to take Cambodians.

MR. NESSEN: I don't believe that was the question. The question was, why did he remove Americans from Cambodia without a clarification of the law, and why ask for it in Vietnam. The answer is there was no time to wait for the clarification to evacuate Americans from Cambodia.

Q To shift over to the Cambodians for a minute and ask about that, if I may, although the number was, as you point out, small, I think the reports were somewhere around 200 nationals of other countries, Cambodia or whatever it was.

At any rate, they were not Americans in that particular group, and they were taken out. The President has conceded or the White House has conceded he has no such authority in the case of nationals of other countries and he is asking for an amendment to the law.

What does he construe then his authority to be, despite the fact the numbers were small? What authority did he have to do it at all?

MR. NESSEN: As I explained, the evacuation plan was designed to save the lives of Americans, for which he believes he has the inherent authority and as sort of an adjunct, or part of that, it turned out, they took some Cambodians out with them. In the case of Vietnam, the numbers mentioned publicly are much larger and would require a separate --

Q I am not talking about Vietnam, I am talking about Cambodia and acknowledged the numbers were small. The fact is that under the Cooper-Church or Cooper-Case amendment, and under the War Powers Act, as I understand it, he just didn't have that authority and he was using American combat troops-- Marines -- on the soil of a country he can't send them into. He did send them in and did take out people who were not Americans. What was the authority?

MR. NESSEN: He sent the military forces there to save the lives of Americans.

Q Then, is it your position that having done that, the military people on the scene then exceeded their authority by taking out about 200 foreign nationals.

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so.

Q Somebody did it, somebody authorized it, somebody permitted it. Who?

MR. NESSEN: The President.

Q He doesn't believe he was in violation, although small, of these various Congressional enactments?

MR. NESSEN: No, because he was doing it under what he believes to be his inherent power to save the lives of Americans.

Q What is the inherent power in saving the lives of Americans to save the lives of nationals of other countries?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, it was done as an adjunct or part of an operation that was designed to save the lives of Americans.

Q You are maintaining he could not have saved the lives of those Americans without bringing out the 200 national of other countries?

MR. NESSEN: I am saying he could not have gone in there with the specific purpose of only saving the lives or evacuating the Cambodians by themselves.

Q I understand that, but then the people on the scene, as you say, acting under the President's orders, went beyond that and brought out 200 nationals of other countries. Again, I can't find in your responses any satisfactory answers to what his authority was for doing that.

MR. NESSEN: Okay.

Q Ron, have the President's advisers given him any reading on the likelihood of Congress giving him authority to use troops to bring out Vietnamese?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard any head count given.

Q Is he optimistic about getting that authority?

MR. NESSEN: I think so, yes.

Q Has he considered what he might do if that authority is not granted?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of.

Q Ron, in last week's foreign policy speech, the President talked about detente with the Soviet Union and said he didn't want it to be a one-way street any more. Can you tell us what he expects from the Soviet Union to make detente a two-way street?

MR. NESSEN: Was that the exact context of that quote?

Q He changed it a little in delivery, I think.

MR. NESSEN: I don't recall that that was the exact quote, Peter.

Q That is the sense of it, I think.

MR. NESSEN: I thought what the quote said -- well, I thought the quote said, "We cannot expect the Soviet Union to show restraint in the face of United States weakness or resolution."

Q Part of that was detente is a two-way street, or two-way relationship, I think he may have said.

MR. NESSEN: I think what he meant was fairly obvious, that he has some concern that if the United States weakens its institutions in foreign affairs or restricts its ability to support a vigorous foreign policy, that if this happened, it could be misinterpreted as a diminished American resolve to carry out its commitments and carry forward the leadership role that the President sees for the United States in various international areas.

Q I wasn't asking that, but there is inherent in this thing that he is expecting something more from the Russians. What is he expecting from the Russians, or the Soviet Union? He also talks of fishing in troubled waters. What does he mean?

MR. NESSEN: I think just what I said, that there shouldn't be any weakening of the ability or determination that would lead other countries to think that the United States has lessened its resolve.

Q What has the Soviet Union done that the President does not want them to do, or what is it that he wants them to do? What does he expect from them? He is inherently critical.

MR. NESSEN: The spirit of detente has not diminished, and he --

Q Was the President's comments on the Soviet Union connected with the fact that he said nothing at all about Portugal in his speech?

MR. NESSEN: No. The selection of a Portuguese government is an internal matter for the Portuguese. The President did speak on the American role in NATO and the role of NATO in the world.

Q Ron, does the President feel that he acted illegally in permitting or ordering Cambodians to be evacuated?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Why not?

MR. NESSEN: I thought I had explained that, but I will again.

The President believes he has the inherent right to protect the lives and safety of American citizens. That was the purpose of the evacuation in Cambodia.

Since the helicopters were going to evacuate Americans, as a humanitarian gesture and part of that evacuation, some Cambodians were taken along.

Q But Cooper-Church doesn't give him that right. It specifically prohibits, that is, appropriated funds for the American operations in, over, or offshore, from four countries, including Cambodia.

MR. NESSEN: Jim, you see, you correctly describe the Cooper-Church resolution, but the President believes that his inherent power to protect American lives, in a sense, supersedes the Cooper-Church amendment.

Q We are not arguing that point, or questioning you on that point. We are not questioning about American lives. We are questioning about Cambodians.

MR. NESSEN: This was a humanitarian gesture carried out as part of a perfectly legal evacuation of Americans to protect their lives and safety.

Q Does the President then believe he could, at any time, order combat troops into a country where Congress had prohibited him from ordering troops in and say, I am doing it as a humanitarian gesture?

MR. NESSEN: I think you are misinterpreting that, Jim. What I said was, he feels he would be able to do that to save American lives and to protect the safety of Americans.

Q But then you continued on beyond that and said that the Cambodians were taken out as a humanitarian gesture.

MR. NESSEN: As part of an operation whose purpose was to protect the lives and safety of Americans.

Q Does the President feel there is some magic figure here, that 200 Cambodians can be taken out by sending in a few extra American helicopters and that is okay, but 200,000 Vietnamese cannot be taken out without special permission because that requires even more helicopters? What is the number at which we change principles here?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it is a question of the numbers so much as it is the fact that this was, as I say, carried on merely as part of an operation to protect American lives and safety, whereas, the kind of numbers that have been talked about publicly in Vietnam would require a separate, larger -- it is not really the larger aspect of it so much as it is the separate operation that would need to be mounted to save the Vietnamese.

Q Ron, some figures have said it may take as many as 40,000 American troops to perform that. Is the President ready to commit that size American force back to Vietnam for the evacuation that he seems favorably inclined to?

MR. NESSEN: Tom, as I said, he has not approved any such evacuation plan and the details of how one would be carried out, if it were decided upon, and if Congress revises the law, as the President requested, is being thought about at the Pentagon rather than over here -- the details of such a plan.

Q Is the President at all ashamed of taking the opportunity to show a little mercy to a few non-Americans?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, did the President's lawyers advise him that this would be legal to take out these 200 nationals of other countries? Did he seek advice from his lawyers on it?

MR. NESSEN: The lawyers decided that he does have the inherent right to protect the lives and safety of Americans.

Q We are talking about the Cambodians.

MR. NESSEN: As a humanitarian gesture, as part of this evacuation of Americans it was decided to take some Cambodians out.

Q There is a great deal of editorial concern about the 5000 or 6000 Americans that are there in Vietnam, and if sizeable numbers begin to be evacuated, there may be a very serious reaction from the South Vietnamese.

Can you give us any guidance as to what the Administration has by way of alleviating this serious concern?

MR. NESSEN: One thing would be not to talk about it in a briefing like this.

Q Ron, it was widely reported over the weekend that General Thieu had attempted to charter a plan to fly 16 tons of gold to Switzerland. I want to ask, first, is the U.S. Embassy over there aware of this report, and has it confirmed this report, that you know of?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard anything about that here.

Q Is the President concerned about that?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard him talk about it.

Q In terms of the evacuation plans, you say there is planning going on just to get a fix on how the President has to operate. Will he not sign any order until he gets the go ahead from Congress? Is that the "MO"?

MR. NESSEN: On the evacuation of the Vietnamese or the evacuation of Americans?

Q Vietnamese.

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, he has asked Congress for the revision in the law that would permit it, and at the moment he has not approved any plan to do it, if it became necessary.

Q Could we go a little beyond that to this April 19 date that the President mentioned in his speech? He asked Congress to enact the clarification, the amendment, and to do one other thing by April 19, saying that at the time the situation was urgent.

If Congress does not act on the Vietnam part of the package by the 19th, what does the President consider his authority in that event? Does he consider he would then have authority to do this anyway, or has he made a decision that he will not under any circumstances do it unless authorized by Congress?

MR. NESSEN: What is that, the evacuation of Americans?

Q The evacuation of Vietnamese.

MR. NESSEN: He would hope, Jim, that Congress would act in that time.

Q I understand that, but since I assume people do look at alternatives and contingencies in the White House, does he consider that in the absence of that authority he might -- in the absence of that Congressional action he might have this authority, perhaps on that same humanitarian ground that you cited or some other grounds or has he reached a decision he will not evacuate any South Vietnamese unless he has authority from Congress?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is a hypothetical question, Jim, since he has asked the Congress for the authority, and to do it with some speed, and I think that is the plan at the moment and he anticipates that Congress would respond favorably.

Q Ron, did the President say they expect to bring out 170,000? Is that a good total?

MR. NESSEN: I think there has been some talk by other officials that have mentioned figures in that range.

Q What will be the emigration status of these people? Will they bring them here to this country?

MR. NESSEN: There have been no decisions made on those kinds of details, if they ever become necessary to do.

Q Ron, does the President feel the Nixon doctrine is now dead?

MR. NESSEN: The doctrine of supplying other countries with the means to defend themselves?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard that it is.

Q Ron, you are aware of the concern on Capitol Hill that the changes in the War Powers Act may result in another Gulf of Tonkin resolution?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Has that proposed change been drafted and, if so, can you give us specifics on clauses which the White House feels would alleviate such concern?

MR. NESSEN: I think probably you weren't here on Saturday when we passed out the draft--where we passed out the proposal, but you can get it in the press room.

Q Ron, in Phnom Penh, according to a dispatch in the New York Times, your credibility is in trouble because you reported from here, I guess on Saturday, that the United States would airlift supplies to Cambodia because the airport was closed and reporters said they went to the airport and it was open and nothing was air dropped all day.

MR. NESSEN: I read the story, and I think it said no air drops were seen. There have been air drops on Phnom Penh.

Q Can you tell us what type of communication the government still has with Phnom Penh without our Embassy there?

MR. NESSEN: By government, you mean the United States government?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: There are communications open to Phnom Penh.

Q Other than news dispatches?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. If news dispatches are getting out, then other dispatches are getting out. The cable office is open, as far as I know, and perhaps radio.

Q He means are we using somebody else's Embassy?

MR. NESSEN: There are no other Embassies left over there, Helen.

Q Reuters is running with a story which says it is virtually certain the President is going to have a summit on the 29th of May. Can you confirm that date for us?

MR. NESSEN: No, I cannot confirm the date.

Q Ron, in connection with that, we have strong indications around here there will be a trip to a NATO summit around the date that Aldo mentioned, and perhaps something at ESC the third or fourth week of July.

As you know, the President has several outstanding invitations to visit heads of state on the continent, and Great Britain as well. What I would like to know is, would those invitations be more likely to be tied to the NATO trip or ESC trip?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't have any detailed travel schedule.

Q How about hunches?

MR. NESSEN: Would you sit down and write about a hunch? I can't imagine you writing a hunch, Walt.

Q If it was yours, I might put it informed sources. (Laughter)

Q What about the 200 Cambodians that were evacuated? Are they coming here?

MR. NESSEN: I think probably the AID people could help you with that. I don't know, frankly.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:47 P.M. EDT)