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N E W S C O N F E R E N C E

#424

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:43 A.M. EST

JANUARY 27, 1976

TUESDAY

MR. NESSEN: You saw the arrival of Prime Minister Rabin and Mrs. Rabin. Our plan is to put out a written report on today's first meeting at 2:30 this afternoon.

Tonight, as you know, there is a dinner beginning at 8 o'clock with the arrival of the Prime Minister and Mrs. Rabin and that will be the regular coverage plans for that.

Sheila Weidenfeld is handling the coverage plans but it is the usual coverage of the arrival and the coming down the stairs, and the entertainment tonight is Carol Burnett and Helen Reddy, and there will be coverage of part of their show.

On the President's schedule today there will be a brief drop-in by the Commander of the VFW and there will be a meeting at 4:30 this afternoon with Ambassador Moynihan. It is a periodic meeting that they have to sort of catch-up on developments and I would certainly think that last night's vote in the Security Council will be one of the matters, but there will be others.

Q When was the Moynihan meeting scheduled?

MR. NESSEN: It has been on the long-range schedule for a week or so, as far as I know.

Q No plans for him to resign?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q You remember during the flap he said, "I am going to stay on a while longer," and there was some speculation that it would be just a while longer.

MR. NESSEN: The President is very pleased with his conduct at the UN.

Q Ron, would you make an attempt to make him available.

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MR. NESSEN: I will ask him but I doubt it, John.

Fran has asked me over a period of days whether the President knew that a good number of the letters on the common situs picketing matter, both pro and con, were form letters, so I dug back to a series of memos. I told you the President gets a weekly memo from Roland Elliott, who is in charge of the Mail Office, and I went back to the period immediately before the decision. And I find that, for instance, on November 14 in a memo to the President, Roland Elliott said the common situs picketing bill has drawn consistently heavy mail. This week there were 4654 letters and more than 100,000 form cards.

The following week, on the 21st, he says that 4465 persons wrote in; there were also 95,000 form cards. Then on the 28th of November, the President got a memo from Roland Elliott saying there were 3702 letters and 101,000 forms, so the answer simply is yes, the President knew that a good deal of the mail on both sides was forms.

Q The question is then who inspired it and was he influenced by the forms?

MR. NESSEN: The President made his decision on the basis of what he explained at the time that he vetoed the bill.

Q So this had no influence?

MR. NESSEN: The President did not take a count and go with the side that turned in the most mail. He made the decision on what he felt was best for the country.

Q Ron, you said there were forms on both sides?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q I understood the large out-pouring of forms was on the negative side.

MR. NESSEN: Well, that is right.

Q You just say there are forms and not tell him they are positive or negative, how about that?

MR. NESSEN: No, in each case there was -- Dick, I agree with you. I feel like doing the same myself.

Q It's that kind of day.

MR. NESSEN: I don't find it right -- well, for instance, in a memo of December 12, which was before the decision, common situs picketing mail, for instance, in favor of signing the bill, there were 251 letters and 694 forms, so he saw both sides. Anyway, I agree with Dick's comment on this whole subject.

Q Ron, on the President's schedule, you left out the meeting with Vice President Rockefeller, is that right?

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry, yes. I didn't bring the paper out with me, but that is a routine weekly meeting.

Q Ron, on another subject, I am wondering why the White House decided not to tell the press until after the Colby ceremony yesterday, when you had a man who apparently performed such a service to the country?

MR. NESSEN: Well, it was just decided to have that as a private ceremony.

Q Why weren't we told in advance that it was going to happen and why weren't pictures provided as they have been on several occasions?

MR. NESSEN: It was just a decision to hold it privately and then we did announce it at about the time it started, I think.

Q Whose decision was that, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: It was a White House decision, Don.

Q Because you wanted no coverage?

MR. NESSEN: Well, it was decided to make it a private ceremony.

Q Why?

MR. NESSEN: Because that was the decision.

Q But you had no reason for it?

MR. NESSEN: There was just a decision to make it a private ceremony, Helen.

Q Mr. Colby's problems and the fact that he was fired, did that have some bearing on your decision?

MR. NESSEN: I think you probably read the citation that went with the medal, Phil, which probably answers the question.

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Q No, it does not. Did the fact that he was fired have anything to do with the fact that you decided not to allow any press coverage or not to tell the press until after it was over?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q We were told yesterday that Mr. Colby requested the private ceremony. Now today we are told that it was a White House decision.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know who requested it or whether he did or somebody in the White House did, but that was the decision anyhow.

We have a letter here that the President is sending to the Speaker today. Let's just take a minute to get these passed out now. It is a letter from the President to the Speaker in which the President states at some length his view of the impending vote on the aid to Angola.

We will just take a minute while that is passed out.

Q While we are waiting, could you please tell us why the decision was made to hold that South Lawn arrival ceremony in the rain today instead of in the East Room?

MR. NESSEN: The time when a decision had to be made was 8:30. The reason it was 8:30 was that it took from 8:30 until 10:30 to set up the East Room. So a final decision had to be made at 8:30. At 8:30 the weather forecast was checked and at that time the weather forecast called for mist and some (Laughter) sort of intermittent or occasional sprinkles but obviously it didn't turn out that way. The decision was made on the basis of a weather forecast that turned out to be not --

Q Does that mean someone is going to fire the forecaster?

MR. NESSEN: I guess that guy's ability to forecast the weather is about like mine on --

Q On a number of matters. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: On one I am thinking of specifically.

Q Ron, on the Moynihan visit with the President, will the Secretary of State be present? Who is going to be there besides the two men?

MR. NESSEN: Besides the President?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: Secretary Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft will also attend the meeting.

Q Ron, I was wondering, at the President's first press conference after he became President he said that the time was not right to shift our embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem as he had advocated while a Congressman. I am wondering if this is scheduled to be discussed or if, to your knowledge, he thinks that any time will be right? What is his position on this?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it will be discussed and I have not asked him lately what his position is.

Q To your knowledge, Ron, just to follow this up, is there any other country in the world where we have our embassy in a city that is not the capital?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to check. I don't know offhand, Les.

Q Thanks.

Q Ron, you probably have been asked about this before but I wonder if you have gotten to the bottom of the question about the Israeli military aid figures and how they happen to be in the budget.

MR. NESSEN: Well, it is somewhat old stuff because the State Department, I know, went over that quite extensively the day of Jerry O'Leary's story, I think.

Q I know but it is the President's budget, not the State Department's budget.

MR. NESSEN: What is the question?

Q Well, the question is, how did the figure happen to find its way into the budget? Do you know, and have you tracked it down to find out where a mistake was made?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure it was a mistake. My understanding is that since that involved an outlay as opposed to a loan it was required to be in the budget, at least that portion of it.

Q Could you expand on that?

Q What do you mean by "that portion," Ron? Are you implying that funds to be made available to Israel in some other manner will make the total more than a billion dollars?

MR. NESSEN: The State Department said that last week.

Q I am not familiar with what they said.

MR. NESSEN: The State Department said: "It is only part of the security assistance package which the Administration will be proposing to Congress. In mid-February we will be presenting a detailed foreign assistance program to Congress for other countries as well as Israel."

So the billion dollars is part of the aid program to Israel but the rest of it will be made public in mid-February, as the State Department said last week. I mean, this is no news.

Q Ron, for either outlays or loans, rarely has a country been singled out in the budget; in fact, I think this is the first time that has happened. It is usually in the foreign aid message. So how can you make that distinction as between outlays and loans?

MR. NESSEN: I am saying I asked the OMB about this and their response was that since it was an outlay it was required that it show in the budget.

Q Ron, I talked to Mr. Ogilvie, who is in charge of that section of the budget, right after Jerry's story came out and he said, "Oh, it was a big mistake, it was an error, we don't know how it happened."

MR. NESSEN: I talked to one person at the OMB and that is the response I got from them.

Q Was that Jim Lynn?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Mr. Ogilvie?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, yesterday when I talked with the budget people about this they said they got hell from all through the Bureau because of this thing and they said also that the Defense Department has submitted a figure and State didn't clear it because it didn't look through the appendix when it was stated.

MR. NESSEN: Well, let me go back to the OMB and see, but I think we ought to move on to this week's news instead of last week's news.

Q Well, for those of us who are not familiar with what the State Department said, and I imagine there may be more than just me, is it the case that the thrust of O'Leary's story is not correct? Are you saying that the ultimate total amount provided for Israel will be indeed more than a billion dollars, and somewhat more?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, Jim, I read you the quotation from the State Department last week which, in so many words, says that.

Q Does it say there will be more aid for Israel?

MR. NESSEN: "It is only part of the security assistance package which the Administration will be proposing to Congress for Israel."

Q Go on.

MR. NESSEN: "In mid-February we will be presenting a detailed foreign assistance program to the Congress for other countries as well as Israel. I have no details for you on the program at this time."

Further down he says, "It is only part of a total which will be presented to Congress as part of a request for all other countries. While I cannot give you any details of the aid package for Israel, I can say it is quite substantial," and so forth and so on. This is part of the aid for Israel.

Q To get to this week's news, the New York Times has a story this morning saying that nonetheless there is still a cut in the aid budget for Israel.

MR. NESSEN: A cut from what?

Q A cut from the present level.

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think we have to wait until mid-February and see what the other part of it is.

Q Will the President have a State of the World address?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q When?

Q To go concurrent with this?

MR. NESSEN: To go concurrent with what?

Q The foreign aid package.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that the two are linked together and there has not been a date set for the State of the World speech.

Q Approximately when will it be, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have a date even approximately.

Q Will he go before Congress?

MR. NESSEN: The format has not been set either.

Q Ron, to get back to today, you are not denying reports that the Administration is considering a sizeable cut in aid to Israel, are you?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot give you the figure, Bob, because the rest of it does not go until next month.

Q But you don't want to deny that, do you?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I don't know how I could deny it since I don't know what the other part of the package is.

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Q Well, all right. That is all I wanted to know.

Q Ron, if we could go back to Angola for a second, in the President's letter to Carl Albert he said that, "Resistance to Soviet expansion by military means must be a fundamental element of U.S. foreign policy." In early December Ambassador Moynihan, on an interview show, said that if the Soviet-backed faction won in Angola, it would endanger the shipping lanes for oil and might also somehow endanger Brazil.

Does the President agree?

MR. NESSEN: I think Ambassador Moynihan has modified his remarks somewhat since then and indicated that that is not the major reason why the President feels that aid to Angola is needed.

Q Ron, in this letter the President also says, "In the absence of effective Western assistance, the two largest political movements in the country will be destroyed by Soviet armament and the Cuban expeditionary force."

It seems to me that is the strongest prediction he has made. He has talked of dire consequences before but now he is saying, "They will be destroyed."

Is that the first time he said that, to your knowledge?

MR. NESSEN: I have to look back at the record. I don't recall.

Q What assurance does the United States feel it has that the influx of our money would turn the tide there?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I am not sure the President is making that claim. I think he is saying that certainly without it the people of Angola will not have an opportunity to choose their own form of Government.

Q Ron, is the thrust of the letter--the fourth paragraph--that the Senate vote is to blame for the current state of events in Angola?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think the whole letter speaks for itself, but it certainly reflects the President's view, yes.

Q How much money is that, \$28 million?

MR. NESSEN: It is tacked onto the defense appropriation bill. I believe it does amount to \$28 million. I don't think there is a specific dollar figure given in the bill.

Q Oh, yes, there is. \$28 million.

Q Ron, has the President been in touch with Chairman Pike about the leaks from the House Intelligence Committee? He said yesterday he had not read the draft report.

MR. NESSEN: No, and he still hasn't.

Q Question?

MR. NESSEN: Muriel had wondered whether the President had first of all read the draft report of the Pike Committee, and the answer is no. And has he been in touch with Pike directly, and the answer to that is no.

Q Is it possible?

MR. NESSEN: It is possible. If he is, it would not be on the subject of leaks, Muriel, it would be on a broader subject of how you -- well, let's wait and see if he does get in touch and then I will make you aware of what he said.

Q Ron, has the President or have any Administration officials been in touch with South Africans to encourage them to leave their forces in Angola?

MR. NESSEN: The South Africans are not consulting with us as to the disposition of their troops.

Q They landed them there. Apparently they were pulling them out; now they are announcing they are staying in.

MR. NESSEN: They do not consult with us on those matters.

Q I am wondering which way the President's speechwriters mean us to interpret the phrase on the second page of the Angola letter, "resistance to Soviet expansion by military means." Whose military means -- theirs or ours?

MR. NESSEN: Theirs.

Q Does this mean, Ron, that the President is suggesting that the Organization of African Unity should send some help? I mean I just wonder, is that what he feels?

MR. NESSEN: Our policy from the beginning has been that this is an African problem that should be solved by Africans.

Q That means the OAU, in other words? This is what the President is suggesting here, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is quite a long letter and very detailed letter, Les, and I don't know how I can go beyond what he spells out pretty clearly here.

Q Did Kissinger get nothing from the Soviets on this problem at all?

MR. NESSEN: I think Dr. Kissinger has given a report on his talks on this subject and I can't go beyond what he said.

Q It is a very strong letter and indicates there has been no give at all.

MR. NESSEN: Well, this letter deals with what the President believes Congress should be doing. The President feels strongly about it and --

Q Does he believe that he has the support of the American people and that the Congress are at odds with the American people's wishes on the subject of Angola?

MR. NESSEN: Well, he spoke of this today as a matter of principle, Walt, and I think he has talked about the question of public support being something that certainly in the long run will come. I don't know that any polls or whatever have been made, and if they had been they would not affect his decision to do what he believes is necessary and right.

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Q Well, my question perhaps should be phrased this way: In the light of the Vietnam experience, does the President think that the American people will support any form of American commitment of materiel even to Angola?

MR. NESSEN: As he said in his State of the Union speech, it is very important that if America is going to learn lessons from history it ought to learn the right lesson from the right episodes and not merely the most recent episode.

The question of public opinion, as I say, is something the President believes in the long run will be perceived by the American people and whether it is currently or not is not a factor in doing what he thinks is right and necessary.

Q Ron, you have been asked what the President's reaction has been to the sense of Congress statement by some 200-plus Members of the House. Have you been asked for a White House reaction on that?

MR. NESSEN: No, but I think you could say, Jim, that this letter is in a sense a response and the letter is one in which the President wants to make sure that the Members of the House understand the issue, or his view of the issue, and of what is at stake before they vote.

Q Ron, did the Speaker release this letter, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know whether it has been released on the Hill or not.

Q When did it go up?

MR. NESSEN: It went up earlier this morning.

Q Do you know what time they vote, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: It is not the first item on the agenda this afternoon in the House.

Q Ron, can you clear some procedural matters on the intelligence changes that the President ultimately will propose? As I understand it, the White House is working with the Church Committee; is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: No. The Church Committee Members have been meeting on occasion with the White House staff to get the White House views and reaction to some of their proposals.

Q So there will be no joint proposals; is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: Correct.

Q The President will make his separately?

MR. NESSEN: Correct.

Q Do you anticipate that the President's proposals will come before any coming from the Church Committee?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what their timetable is, John. As I said yesterday, the President is certainly within a couple of weeks of making his public. He has made, I think, most of the decisions at least on a tentative basis.

Q Have those decisions been conveyed to the Church Committee as a whole or to some Members of it, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of, John.

Q Is the President concerned that they would leak out if he did not?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think that was a factor, no.

Q Can you explain why the President has not answered a questionnaire from the Energy Action Commission asking him whether he would accept large gifts from the executives of oil companies for his campaign or from their political action groups?

MR. NESSEN: Well, as you know, the Federal election law prohibits any gifts larger than \$1,000 from any individual. We have this season a large number of questionnaires come in from different publications and we are answering them as fast as we can. The intention is to answer all or most of them that can be answered, and that goes on all the time.

Q Who does the answering?

MR. NESSEN: Well, the President gives his views on what the answers should be and then they are drafted and passed back before the President for his approval.

I am told this group, the Energy -- what -- Action Commission wanted a yes or no and no elaboration. The group, I am told, wanted a simple yes or no and would not accept anything that went beyond a one-word answer. I guess on that basis it will not be answered.

Q Ron, I understand that the Sonny Montgomery group that came had previously sent a written report to the President and it was my understanding that that report indicates that maybe we should try to reach some accommodation with the North Vietnamese at least partly to try and resolve the MIA issue. Do you have anything that you can tell us on that, the President's views?

MR. NESSEN: The President's views are today the same as they were when he made his speech at the East-West Center in Honolulu and they have not really changed, and you know what they were then.

Q So he really has no reaction to the report?

MR. NESSEN: Not specifically to the report. I think the fact that the North Vietnamese have turned over some bodies of Americans who had been missing for quite a long time is viewed as the kind of hopeful sign that the President was talking about in Honolulu.

Q Ron, questions are piling up on Angola, on the whole intelligence issue, on the economy and a good many other issues. When does the President plan to hold a press conference?

MR. NESSEN: Well, not this week, Jim.

Q Can you give any kind of time frame?

MR. NESSEN: Not other than to say he will continue to hold them on a regular basis and I would not be surprised if there were a news conference fairly soon, but not this week.

Q Ron, is there a meeting with the President coming up Wednesday? Do you have anything on that, any schedule for Wednesday?

MR. NESSEN: He will be meeting with Prime Minister Rabin again tomorrow and I have not seen the rest of his schedule that I recall at the moment. Did you have something special in mind?

Q You don't know what he is going to do in the evening?

MR. NESSEN: I think he has been invited to a reciprocal reception by --

Q That is Thursday.

MR. NESSEN: Is it?

Q Reciprocal reception by Rabin -- yes.

MR. NESSEN: What is it you had in mind and maybe it will jog my memory?

Q Anything at any hotel downtown?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, I see.

Q No, no, I am not talking about the Washington Press Club; he is invited to that, too. But anything other than that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of any evening plans he has tomorrow.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END (AT 12:08 P.M. EST)

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