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OPEC MEETING

Does the President have any comment on the departure of the Saudi Arabian Oil Minister Yamani from the OPEC Conference in Doha?

I do not think I am going to comment on the day-to-day developments of this conference.

MIA REPORT

Does the President have any comment on the report released yesterday by the House Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia?

I have nothing for you on that at this time. Copies of the report, which was only released yesterday, have been received and its conclusions and recommendations on the MIA question will be studied carefully.

[The President's policy has been that the United States is pledged to the fullest possible accounting of our MIA's]

LEBANESE ENVOY

Will anyone at the White House be meeting with the Lebanese Envoy, Ghassan Tuani, who is in the United States to discuss reconstruction aid for Lebanon.

I do not believe Mr. Tuani's schedule, which is being coordinated by the State Department, has been fully finalized so as yet I do not know whether he will be seeing anyone here. I do know, however, that he met with Under Secretary Habib and Assistant Secretary Atherton over at State yesterday and will be seeing Secretary Kissinger today.

January 27, 1975

BACKGROUND ON M. I. A. SITUATION

JWR

Early Saturday evening representatives of the League of Families called the wires claiming that President Ford had promised to set up a task force or Presidential Commission to investigate the evidence that there are still M. I. A.'s being held prisoner in communist territory in S. E. Asia. They said the information came from General Lawson, who, they claimed, had been asked to talk to the President by the League of Families. General Lawson told me that he had met with the President before speaking to the League Representatives; that he had expressed to the League the President's very deep concern over the situation. He said the Proclamation issued Saturday was a demonstration of that concern. He told the League that the President is studying the possibility of establishing a new panel to see what further can be done in the situation, and expected to reach a decision in the coming weeks. This I reported to the wires, also providing background advice discouraging the special task force-commission idea.

FYI ONLY -

GENERAL LAWSON SAYS THAT A DECISION HAD BEEN REACHED TO ESTABLISH AN INTER-AGENCY PANEL, BUT WHEN THAT FACT BECAME KNOWN TO THE LEAGUE, THEIR EMOTIONAL REACTION AGAINST IT WAS SO STRONG THAT HE WENT BACK TO THE PRESIDENT AND URGED HIM TO REOPEN THE MATTER; TO CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY OF A SPECIAL PANEL OR PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION OR TASK FORCE. LAWSON STILL THINKS THE INTERAGENCY PANEL IS THE WAY THE FINAL DECISION WILL GO, BUT SAYS IT IS A TOUGH PROBLEM BECAUSE OF THE STRONG OPPOSITION OF THE LEAGUE OF FAMILIES. LAWSON SAID THE PRESIDENT PROMISED A DECISION IN 6 WEEKS.

MEETING WITH MIA FAMILIES

Jimmy Carter will be meeting this afternoon in Phoenix with families of Americans who remain listed as missing in action. While I'm certain Mr. Carter shares my concern and compassion for lives of these men and the untold burden which their families have borne, I can only wonder what he plans to tell them.

TALKING POINTS:

1. Last April, Mr. Carter charged that President Ford had politicized the MIA issue when the President announced that his Administration would not normalize diplomatic relations with Vietnam in sole return for a complete recounting of our missing in action. Indeed, the President's remarks were made in recognition of the negotiating tactics which the North Vietnamese had frequently employed and his desire to spare the MIA families from being a pawn in diplomacy.
2. The President's position has remained consistent--he will not entertain restoration of full diplomatic relations with Vietnam nor accept their membership to the United Nations until there is a full accounting of the MIA's.
3. I am also curious as to what Mr. Carter plans to say to these families about amnesty for draft evaders and deserters:
 - "Questioned on amnesty for draft evaders, Carter began his answer by declaring that the Americans who fought in Vietnam particularly those who went despite a belief that the war was wrong are heroes. He then endorsed pardons for those resisters who fled to Canada or elsewhere to avoid going to Vietnam." (New York Times, January 26, 1976)
 - Subsequently, as one of several attempts to redress his reported weakness among liberal voters, Carter stated that "I'll tell you that in the first week that I am in the White House I will declare a blanket pardon for all those who fled to Sweden and Canada." (AP May 15, 1976)

4. Jimmy Carter's revolving door policy on amnesty reflects his preoccupation with political expediency and fails to address the critical importance of maintaining the integrity and continuity of the nation's military service in order to insure our national security.
5. Finally, I am curious if Mr. Carter will tell these families that he supports a cut in the current defense budget by \$5 to \$15 billion, depending on which speech version he chooses to use. President Ford's 1976 budget reflects the first year of real growth in defense spending in nearly a decade.