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THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESS CONFERENCE  
OF  
HENRY A. KISSINGER,  
SECRETARY OF STATE  
AND  
ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT  
FOR NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

3:02 P.M. EST

MR. NESSEN: Ladies and gentlemen, in response to your request to talk to Dr. Kissinger about the Far East trip, here is Dr. Kissinger. This is all on the record for immediate release, no live broadcast and those are the only rules.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: If I had known there was no live broadcast I wouldn't have come here. (Laughter)

Let me make a few very brief remarks about the purpose of the trip and then I will take your questions on that or any other subject.

You will remember that a visit to Japan by the President was foreseen in a Japanese-American communique last year. It was announced to take place by the end of 1974 and it was reaffirmed on a number of occasions afterwards. It will be an historic event in that it is going to be the first visit by an American President to Japan, reflecting the great importance we attach to the relationship with Japan.

In recent years, our relations with Japan have undergone a series of adjustments brought about by new conditions in the Far East, the growing strength and self-confidence of Japan and the emergence of a pattern of equality. We consider this relationship excellent.

We believe also that the future stability of the Pacific area depends importantly on a close understanding between the United States and Japan and which is symbolized by the visit of the President and by the occasion that this will

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give for full exchanges with Japanese leaders.

The President called in the Japanese Ambassador on the first afternoon of the day that he was sworn in as President. On that occasion, in affirming the continuity of American foreign policy, he also specifically affirmed that he would meet the commitment of his predecessor to visit Japan by the end of 1974.

So, this trip was planned as one of the first acts of President Ford and we consider it essential for the overall design of foreign policy. While being in Japan, we expect to review with the Japanese leaders bilateral relations of Japan and the United States, which, I repeat, we consider excellent, as well as to review the international situation and in order to make certain that we understand each other as to basic principles and objectives.

The visit to Korea is a natural complement to the visit to Japan. We could not be in that area and not visit Korea without raising grave doubts that our commitment to Korea was still what it has traditionally been. The visit to Vladivostok reflects the necessity of the leaders of the two nuclear superpowers to be in frequent touch with each other, a necessity which is particularly acute after a change of Administration in the United States, to enable the two leaders to have an opportunity to exchange views on the whole range of our relationships, on possible difficulties that may arise, but even more importantly, on how to give momentum to the commitment to detente that they have both expressed.

This is the basic purpose of the trip, and now I will be glad to take your questions.

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Q Mr. Secretary, with respect to the difficulties that may arise, before you get into the questions on the trip, I would like to ask what your assessment is of the possibility of an outbreak of warfare in the Middle East now, in view of a spate of reports yesterday and today from the area about possible preemptive Israeli attacks, the unloading of huge amounts of Soviet armaments in Syria, the visits to the Golan Heights and that. Could you give us your opinion?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: Obviously, we have seen these reports, and we are checking into them on an urgent basis. We cannot believe that any of the parties in the Middle East would resort to war under these circumstances.

We cannot believe that any major power would deliberately encourage war in a situation as serious and as potentially explosive as that in the Middle East. The United States would certainly oppose any idea that the problems of the Middle East can be solved by military action and will use its influence with all parties to prevent this from arising. It expects that all other countries that are in a position to do so would exercise a similar restraining influence.

So, we think that these reports are probably -- if they are not exaggerated as to the facts, we do not believe that military actions are imminent.

Q Mr. Secretary, another point on your travels will be Peking this year, and it has been almost a year since you were there before. Do you expect this visit to bring further progress towards normalization of relations or anything of a substantive sort?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: The relationships between the United States and the Peoples Republic of China are good, and they are progressing in the manner that has been foreseen on our previous visits, including the last one.

Every trip is within the context of promoting the normalization of relationships and to represent a step towards the normalization of relationships. I do not expect any dramatic announcements as a result of this trip, but I expect a continuation of the steady progress that has marked our previous contacts and a further improvement of our relationship.

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Q Mr. Secretary, do you think it is inevitable that Israel is going to have to deal with Mr. Arafat and the PLO in subsequent negotiations now that a certain amount of recognition in stature has been given the organization by Rabat and by the General Assembly, and if so, under what conditions would it be possible for Israel to do this?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: As you know, I expressed the view of the Administration, which has not changed, that the proper negotiation, or the best negotiation for the future of the West Bank was between Jordan and Israel, and the United States had used its influence to bring about such a negotiation.

As to any other parties that might negotiate, this is entirely a decision for Israel and for any of the other parties that may be involved, and it is not a matter on which the United States will give advice as to the conditions in which such negotiations may be appropriate, if indeed it is appropriate.

Q Mr. Secretary, could you give us your appraisal of the Arab and of the Israeli reactions to the fact that more than a month elapsed before General Brown apologized for his remarks at Duke and he was only mildly reprimanded by the President?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I frankly have no view as to what the Arab or Israeli reaction to this is. It is my understanding that the President expressed his opposition to the views as expressed by General Brown, and this certainly reflects the view of the Administration.

We don't consider this a subject of foreign policy decisions, because, clearly, the Administration's view has been repeatedly enunciated and has been in no way affected by any remarks that were made by any military leader.

Q Mr. Secretary, isn't the President taking a sizeable risk by traveling abroad like this at a time when there is no Vice-President in place?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: You have to remember that the President committed himself to this trip on his first day in office at a time when it was considered inconceivable that a Vice-President would not be confirmed by this time.

To cancel a trip because a Vice-President hasn't been confirmed would give an impression of domestic instability that would in itself be a foreign policy factor, and, therefore, the President decided to continue with a trip, which we consider extremely important in its own right under conditions which could not be foreseen at the time the decision was made.

Q Mr. Secretary, you said a moment ago that you couldn't believe -- or words to that effect -- that any major power would deliberately encourage war in the Middle East?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: That is correct.

Q I assume you might mean the Soviet Union. I would like to ask whether you have any information or evidence to indicate that the Soviet Union might be encouraging war?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: We have no evidence that the Soviet Union is encouraging war, and, as I have said, we are using all our influence with both parties and we are certainly calling to the attention of all other countries the importance of restraint in the Middle East.

Q Is the Soviet Union using its influence in a positive direction in your opinion, sir?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: This recent flare-up has only come to our attention in the last few hours and it isn't clear to us yet what it means and I would warn against over-exaggerating the imminence of any conflict there. But we are certainly calling it to the attention of the Soviet Union.

Q Mr. Secretary, could you give us a more thorough view of your current appraisal of the Middle East situation as the President and you are about to depart for a considerable period of time? Do you have any special anxiety that there will be a hiatus here during this period when we are now at a stage of seeing considerable reports of imminent action? What is your basic view of the hazard here?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: The President and I met with Secretary Schlesinger this morning and we reviewed contingencies which might arise and mechanisms of how to deal with them if they should arise. I repeat, this is a normal precaution. We do not expect the contingencies to arise. We do not believe that prior to a meeting between the General Secretary and the President the Soviet Union would be encouraging military action in the Middle East and we cannot believe that any of the parties in the Middle East would be so reckless as to engage in military action.

So, while we recognize that certain military precautions have been taken by both sides and while there is always a risk that precautions could get out of hand, we do not think a war is likely. If it should occur, we have made contingency plans for dealing with it. Communications are, of course, very rapid and we would deal with it on that basis.

Q Mr. Secretary, also on the Middle East, does the United States detect any change or moderation in the statements made by Mr. Arafat representing the Palestinians? Does that make any difference as far as the United States is concerned? And also, what are your plans on traveling to the Middle East?

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SECRETARY KISSINGER: With respect to the speech itself, our reading of it is that it called for a state which really did not include the existence of Israel and therefore was dealing with a successor state, and we do not consider this a particularly moderate position.

With respect to my own plans, I have no plans now to go to the Middle East. This could change but as I pointed out before, we think that this is now a period for quiet diplomacy and I do not expect to return to the Middle East in the near future.

Q Before, I noticed you used the past tense in referring to our preference -- "was" -- for negotiations between Israel and Jordan. Do you think in the current situation there is a live possibility of negotiating with Jordan?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: It is my understanding that King Hussein has accepted the decisions of the Rabat Summit to the effect that the PLO should be the principal negotiator on the West Bank and this explains my reference to the past.

Q Mr. Secretary, has the Syrian Government indicated to you, as far as you know, its attitude toward an extension of the U.N. presence on the Golan Heights and whether it has or hasn't, how much of any importance do you attach to its attitude toward that question that will soon be coming up?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: The Syrian Government has not given us a formal answer as to the extension of UNDOF on the Golan Heights, and to the best of my knowledge, I do not believe that they have given a formal answer to anybody. They have, however, indicated on a number of occasions grave doubts about the extension of UNDOF and if one were to quote the statements that they have made, one could construe them as an indication that they probably will not agree to the extension.

It is our view that failure to extend UNDOF would cast doubts on the viability of agreements that may be made in that area and we therefore believe that the extension of UNDOF is important for the continuation of the negotiating process and especially for negotiating prospects that may exist between Syria and Israel and the failure to extend it would undoubtedly contribute to the tension in the area.

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Q Mr. Secretary, I would like to ask a couple of questions about your oil speech last night. Why did you say, "In the meantime, we will face two great dangers. One is the threat of a new embargo." And secondly, what kind of a response can you expect from other consuming nations when the United States, itself, has not yet come up with a serious program for conservation or developing alternate sources of energy?

SECRETARY Kissinger: With respect to the first question, it is obvious that the possibility of another embargo exists and the emergency program that will be agreed to next week -- that has been agreed to but will be formally adopted next week -- provides for precisely this contingency. We went through an embargo last year and the possibility of an embargo cannot be ignored. Therefore, in order to enable the consuming nations to withstand political pressures, we consider this program is of the first significance.

Secondly, in my speech which I went over carefully with the President before I gave it, we stated the goals that have to be met in order to meet the objectives that were set in the speech, the objectives being to reduce dependence on imported oil, to create a situation in which alternative sources, coupled with conservation restraints and financial solidarity, bring about a reduction in the price of oil.

And in any event, the cooperation among the consumers is essential whether or not the price of oil comes down. In fact, it is even more essential if the price of oil does not come down. The goals that I stated are the Administration goals. The methods by which they are reached, whether they are done by voluntary restraints or by other measures will be reflected in Presidential speeches to the Congress.

In any event, the United States has expressed its readiness in this speech to accept internationally binding consumption restraints and therefore the question of whether or not we are now engaged in them is really irrelevant to the program that has been set forth which we are prepared to undertake on an international basis.

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Q Mr. Secretary, I would like to ask a question about the wisdom and timing of the Far East trip specifically with regard to visiting Prime Minister Tanaka and his problems at home. I would like, if you would, please, to address yourself to the fact that Mr. Tanaka may in fact be a lame duck Prime Minister. Also, if you would address yourself to the fact, please, that President Ford will be visiting Korea where the Government has come under severe criticism for being rather oppressive, contrary to Democratic principles, and if you would, sir, please address yourself to the site of the meeting place in the Soviet Union which is either on or close to disputed territory with the Chinese.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: With respect to the first question, the visit to any country is to the Government and not to any particular individual. We don't express any view as to what difficulties Prime Minister Tanaka may or may not be in, and therefore, I don't accept the basic premise of your question.

But the fact of the matter is that the major figures in Japan with whom we will be dealing, have shown considerable stability in terms of their participation in the Government, and therefore, we believe that whatever may happen in Japan -- and we do not accept that the contingency you foresee is inevitable -- that therefore the trip should go forward.

Secondly, it is clear that the President of the Republic of Korea is being criticized. We did not think that this outweighs the consideration that I have mentioned before, that the failure to visit Korea might be understood as a reduction in the degree of the American commitment to the security of South Korea, which could have serious international consequence.

With respect to the site of the meeting with the Soviet Union, this is a matter that has been discussed and we have received no complaints from the Chinese side.

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Q Mr. Secretary, without disclosing your contingency plans, we have been reading about alleged NSC memos and so forth, foreseeing a possibility that the U.S. might go in this time if there was another Arab-Israeli conflict. Do you foresee any possibility?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: Do I personally foresee any possibility?

Q Yes, of the U.S. going into a Middle East war.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: First of all, I don't foresee a Middle East war. Secondly, I don't confirm that there are any NSC contingency plans for the United States to go into an Arab-Israeli war. The United States' attitude will be what it has been in previous wars, and our attitude is basically to avoid a conflict and to bring it to the most rapid conclusion possible if there should be one, but we believe there is every possibility of avoiding a conflict now and therefore, there is no sense speculating on what we might do.

But it is clear that the United States intentions, unless there should be other outside intervention, would be to confine its role to what it has been.

Q Mr. Secretary, last night in Phoenix, President Ford, in answer to a general question on Middle East policy, mentioned that Israel has been urged to make peace, to reach agreements with Egypt and "other Arab nations." He was pressed on the question of whether the PLO should be recognized and he repeated that Israel should reach agreements with Egypt and "other Arab parties," which left the answer ambiguous and I wish you would clear it up, whether or not we regard the PLO as a nation or a party or in the final analysis, as a negotiating partner, although I recognize what you said earlier that it is an Israeli decision.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I have to repeat what I said earlier. The United States is not engaged in promoting any particular set of negotiations. I have stated what our view as to the most effective strategy has been and we have not expressed any recommendation to any of the parties with whom they should negotiate.

Q What are your maximum hopes for a strategic arms achievement at the Vladivostok summit?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: The issue of strategic arms limitation is an extremely complicated one, involving many weapons systems, many technologies and the fact is, as I have pointed out on a number of occasions, that the forces of the two sides have been designed in a different manner, with different characteristics so that comparisons are sometimes difficult.

Therefore, it is very hard to foretell any specific achievement. We believe that progress was made during my talks with General Secretary Brezhnev in Moscow. We think that this progress can be continued in Vladivostok. Whether the progress will lend itself to some formal statement, or whether it will lead to being transferred to the Geneva negotiations, or whether some other method will be chosen and the exchanges will continue, can really not be predicted until there have been some further discussions building on the discussions that took place in Moscow.

MORE

Q Mr. Secretary, in part of your speech last night, in your proposal to cut oil imports, were you just referring to Arab nations or were you also proposing to cut oil imports from Canada?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I was referring to cutting overall oil imports, not just from the Arab nations.

Q Mr. Secretary, given the position of moral leadership that the United States undertook in convening the World Food Conference, why was the decision reached not to follow the advice of the U. S. delegation and provide an extra million tons of food.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: First of all, as I understand it, this was not a recommendation of the U. S. delegation, but was a recommendation of some members of the U. S. delegation.

But, let me make clear what our position had been with respect to the World Food Conference. We face two problems: the basic problem of world food shortages, which is a structural one, and the immediate, emergency problem of the shortages this year that cannot be dealt with by any structural changes.

The United States believes that no matter what food aid is given this year, structural adjustments in world agriculture policies are essential. This is why we proposed the export planning group of the exporting nations and why we proposed a group to promote the increase in agriculture in the underdeveloped nations, which is one of the most essential elements, and why we proposed a reserve program.

Food aid is one relatively small part of the overall problem. Now, with respect to food aid, we have stated that we will do what is humanly possible in order to give the maximum food aid. The differences in the government concern tactics and not substance.

The difference concerns the question of whether we should announce a specific target before we know what the crop reports are and produce an increase in prices in this country and contribute to the inflation, or whether we should continue to operate on a quarterly basis as we have been on the basis of crop reports and in a manner

that enables us to make the decisions without having the undesirable consequences that I described.

As a matter of fact, most of the decisions that have been taken in the last quarter have been at the high end of the option, and I personally expect that by the time that the year is over, we will have increased not only the dollar amount, but the quantity of the food aid.

But, the President wanted to reserve the option of looking at it every quarter so that the difference between those members of the delegation, who ask for a flat commitment, and the dominant trend in the Administration, including the view of the President, is really primarily a matter of how to give food aid without producing inflationary pressures in this country and, therefore, maybe endangering the whole food aid problem.

I personally regret that the issue of the World Food Conference, which really should deal with the structural problem of food, has been tied up with a one-year allocation of food aid, which is not going to be decisive in dealing with the overall issue that we have described.

Q Mr. Secretary, do you believe that there is any connection at all between the reports that we have been receiving now about mobilization in the Middle East and the fact that the President is about to embark on this trip? Can there be any linkage?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I consider that extremely unlikely, and I would have thought that the imminent meeting of the President with the General Secretary should have a calming effect on the situation rather than an accelerated effect.

It must be obvious to the parties concerned that anyone who wantonly starts a war under these conditions would be putting himself into a very dubious position internationally and with its relationship with the United States, and, obviously, this must be clear to any of the Soviet leaders whom we do not believe are encouraging the tensions right now, and we do not believe that a conflict is imminent.

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Q It is not possible, you think, that, rightly or wrongly, that other powers might perceive that the United States in effect is in a weakened condition?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: It would be a very serious miscalculation.

Q May I also ask, do these reports in any way directly contradict assurances you had received, either from the Soviets or others during your Middle East travels?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I did not have the impression on my Middle East travel that any of the parties were planning imminent military operations.

As far as the Soviets are concerned, it seems to me to go without saying that prior to a meeting between the General Secretary and the President that they should not, and in my belief, are not taking action, to exacerbate the situation.

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Q Mr. Secretary, you said you didn't have the impression. Did you have specific assurances in the Middle East about this situation?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I have stated my view. Certainly all of the parties know that the United States would be opposed, strongly opposed, to the resumption of hostilities.

Q Mr. Secretary, do you expect any major agreements to be signed in Japan or should we consider that trip primarily symbolic?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I think a trip can be substantive without major agreements being signed. In negotiations with Japan it is very important to permit the Japanese consensus-building to develop and not to expect in a three-day visit to accelerate any particular decision.

We believe that there will not be any major agreement signed, but we nevertheless believe that the trip will be highly substantive.

If I may make one other comment about all these Middle East questions. There is a tendency, if I may say so, to overreact to reports. It was the case after the Rabat Summit. It seems to me to be the case today.

In our judgment we are not in a situation of imminent conflict and I do not think that it contributes to stability go give the impression that we are.

Q Mr. Secretary, there have been reports recently that Egypt is now linking the reopening of the Suez Canal to a further Israeli pullback in Sinai. Yet during the January disengagement agreement, we were told that the canal would be reopened as quickly as possible. Is there a tie-in between the two?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: We have not received any formal communication from the Egyptians to that effect. I have seen statements in the press which allege this, or in which Egyptian officials are quoted as having said this. We would consider this inconsistent with the disengagement agreement, but it will be a moot point until the canal clearance is completed, which is not yet the case.

16 - 16 - 16  
SECRETARY OF STATE

Q What can you tell us about the likely degree of Japanese acceptance of the plan you outlined last night, and would you expect something to come in Tokyo on that?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I do not expect that in the period of three days there will be any major decisions taken on a plan that was as embracing as the one that was put forward last night. We undoubtedly will have some discussions on that subject. I think the final decisions will have to be taken in a multilateral framework and not on a bilateral basis between individual countries.

I would expect that progress will be made, not necessarily next week, but in the months ahead, just as progress was made, after the Pilgrims speech last year, over a six-month period in implementing both the proposal for an agency and the proposal for an emergency sharing program.

And we believe, since there is really no realistic alternative to the major direction that has been proposed that over a period of months some of the main elements, or many of the main elements of the proposal will be implemented.

We are not putting it forward on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. Within the framework of the general objectives, we are quite openminded as to counter proposals. But we believe this is the direction in which the consuming nations ought to go and we think this is the direction they will go.

THE PRESS: Mr. Secretary, thank you very much.

END (AT 3:40 P.M. EST)