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UNTIL 7:30 P. M. (EDT)

MARCH 6, 1975

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

Before we start on questions tonight, I would like to make a statement on the subject of assistance to Cambodia and South Vietnam.

There are three issues. The first is the future of the people who live there. It is a concern that is humanitarian--food for those who hunger and medical supplies for the men, women and children who are suffering the ravages of war. We seek to stop the bloodshed and end the horror and tragedy that we see on television as rockets are fired wantonly into Phnom Penh. I would like to be able to say that the killing would cease if we were to stop our aid, but that is not the case. The record shows, in both Vietnam and Cambodia, that a Communist takeover of an area does not bring an end to violence, but on the contrary, subjects the innocent to new horrors.

We cannot meet humanitarian needs unless we also provide some military assistance. Only through a combination of humanitarian endeavors and military aid do we have a chance to stop the fighting in that country in such a way as to end the bloodshed.

The second issue is whether the problems of Indochina will be settled by conquest or by negotiation.

Both the government of Cambodia and the United States have made vigorous and continued efforts over the years to bring about a ceasefire and political settlement.

The Cambodian Government declared a unilateral ceasefire and called for negotiations immediately after the Peace Accords of January, 1973. It has since repeatedly expressed its willingness to be flexible in seeking a negotiated end to the conflict. Its leaders have made clear that they are willing to do whatever they can to bring peace to that country.

The United States has backed these peace efforts. Yesterday, we made public an outline of our own unceasing efforts over the years, including six separate initiatives since I became President.

Let me assure you: We will support any negotiations and accept any outcome that the parties themselves will accept; as far as the United States is concerned, the personalities involved will not, themselves, constitute obstacles of any kind to a settlement.

Yet all of our efforts have been rebuffed. Peace in Cambodia has not been prevented by our failure to offer reasonable solutions. The aggressor believes that it can win its objectives on the battlefield. This belief will be encouraged if we cut off assistance to our friends.

We want an end to the killing and a negotiated settlement. But there is

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no hope of success unless the Congress quickly provides the necessary means for Cambodia to survive.

If we abandon our allies, we will be saying to all the world that war pays. Aggression will not stop; rather it will increase. In Cambodia, the aggressors will have shown that if negotiations are resisted, the United States will weary, abandon its friends, and force will prevail.

The third issue is the reliability of the United States. If we cease to help our friends in Indochina, we will have violated their trust that we would help them with arms, food and supplies so long as they remain determined to fight for their own freedom. We will have been false to ourselves, to our word, and to our friends. No one should think for a moment that we can walk away from that without a deep sense of shame.

This is not a question of involvement or reinvolverment in Indochina. We have ended our involvement. All American forces have come home. They will not go back.

Time is short. There are two things the U. S. can do to affect the outcome. For my part, I will continue to seek a negotiated settlement. I ask the Congress to do its part by providing the assistance required to make such a settlement possible.

Time is running out.

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