

PRESS CONFERENCE NO. 10
of the
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

7:31 P.M. EDT
March 6, 1975
Thursday

In Room 450
The Old Executive Office
Building
Washington, D.C.

THE PRESIDENT: Good evening. Will you please sit down.

Before we start the questions tonight, I would like to make a statement on the subject of assistance to Cambodia and to Vietnam. There are three issues -- the first, 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 and 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 in Cambodia that 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 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 governments of Cambodia and the United States have made vigorous and continued efforts over the last few years to bring about a cease-fire and a political settlement.

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THE PRESIDENT: 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 do to bring peace to the country.

The United States has backed these peace efforts. Yesterday, we made public an outline of our 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 agree to. 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 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 no hope of success unless the Congress acts quickly to provide 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, with food, and with 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 re-involvement in Indochina. We have ended our involvement. All American forces have come home. They will not go back.

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Time is short. There are two things the United States can do to effect 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.

Mr. Cormier.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, you wound up saying "time is running out in Cambodia." Can you give us any assurance that even if the aid is voted it will get there in time? Is it stockpiled and ready to roll or what is the situation?

THE PRESIDENT: If we don't give the aid, there is no hope. If we do get the necessary legislation from the Congress and it comes quickly -- I would say within the next ten days or two weeks -- it will be possible to get the necessary aid to Cambodia, both economic assistance, humanitarian assistance and military assistance, I believe there is a hope that we can help our friends to continue long enough to get into the wet season when there will be an opportunity for the kind of negotiation which I think offers the best hope for a peace in Cambodia.

QUESTION: Mr. President, would you tell us what Director Colby has told you of any CIA connection with the assassination of foreign leaders?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not in a position to give you any factual account. I have had a full report from Mr. Colby on the operations that have been alluded to in the news media in the last week or so, really involving such actions that might have taken place beginning back in the 1960s.

I don't think it is appropriate for me at this time to go any further. We do have an investigation of the CIA, of our intelligence agencies, by the Congress, both overt and covert, going back from the inception of the CIA. And, of course, we do have the Rockefeller Commission going into any CIA activities in the domestic front.

But for me to comment beyond that, I think, would be inappropriate at this time.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you say there would be a deep sense of shame in the country if Cambodia should fall. If that would be the case, sir, can you explain why there seems to be such a broad feeling of apathy in the country, and also in the Congress, toward providing any more aid for either Cambodia or South Vietnam.

THE PRESIDENT: I believe there is a growing concern which has been accentuated since we have seen the horror stories on television in recent weeks. The wanton use of rockets in the city of Phnom Penh, the children lying stricken on the streets and people under great stress and strain, bloody scenes of the worse kind.

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I think this kind of depicting of a tragedy there has aroused American concern, and I think it is a growing concern as the prospect of tragedy of this kind becomes even more evident.

So, I have noticed in the last week in the United States Congress, in a bipartisan way, a great deal more interest in trying to find an answer. And yesterday I spent an hour-plus with Members of Congress who came back from a trip to Cambodia and South Vietnam and they saw first-hand the kind of killing, the kind of bloodshed, and it had a severe impact on these Members of Congress, some of whom have been very, very strongly opposed to our involvement in the past in Vietnam.

And I think their impact will be significant in the Congress as well as in the country.

Mr. Lisagor?

QUESTION: Mr. President, the question is raised by many critics of our policy in Southeast Asia as to why we can conduct a policy of detente with the two Communist superpowers in the world and could not follow a policy of detente should Cambodia and South Vietnam go Communist.

Could you explain that to us?

THE PRESIDENT: I think you have to understand the differences that we have with China -- the People's Republic of China -- and with the Soviet Union. We do not accept their ideology. We do not accept their philosophy. On the other hand, we have to recognize that both countries have great power bases in the world, not only in population but in the regions in which they exist.

We do not expect to recognize or to believe in their philosophies, but it is important for us, the United States, to try and remove any of the obstacles that keep us from working together to solve some of the problems that exist throughout the world, including Indochina.

The Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China have supplied and are supplying military assistance to South Vietnam and Cambodia. We have to work with them to try and get an answer in that part of the world, but at the same time, I think that effort can be increased and the prospects improved if we continue the detente between ourselves and both of those powers.

QUESTION: Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: Tom?

QUESTION: Mr. President, putting it bluntly, wouldn't we just be continuing a blood bath that already exists in Cambodia if we voted the \$222 million in assistance?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think so, because the prospects are that with the kind of military assistance and economic and humanitarian aid we are proposing, the government forces hopefully can hold out. If we do not, the prospects are almost certain that Phnom Penh will be overrun; and we know from previous experiences that the overrunning of a community or an area results in the murder and the bloodshed that comes when they pick up and sort out the people who were the school teachers, the leaders, the government officials.

This was told very dramatically to me yesterday by several Members of the Congress who were there and talked to some of the people who were in some of these communities or villages that were overrun.

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It is an unbelievable horror story. If we can hold out -- and I think the prospects are encouraging -- then I think we will avoid that kind of massacre and innocent murdering of people who really do not deserve that kind of treatment.

QUESTION: If I may follow up, as I understand it, the Administration's point is that if we vote the aid that we will have the possibility of a negotiated settlement, not just the avoidance of a bloodbath. Is that correct?

THE PRESIDENT: That is correct, sir.

QUESTION: And yet, just yesterday, as you indicated in your statement, the State Department listed at least six unsuccessful efforts to negotiate an end to the war in Cambodia, dating to the summer of 1973, when American bombing stopped there.

The Cambodian government was certainly stronger then than it would be with just conceivably another \$220 million.

THE PRESIDENT: I think if you look at that long list of bonafide, legitimate negotiated efforts, the best prospects came when the enemy felt that it would be better off to negotiate than to fight.

If we can strengthen the government forces now and get into the wet season, then I believe the opportunity to negotiate will be infinitely better, certainly better than if the government forces are routed and the rebels -- the Khmer Rouge -- take over and do what they have done in other communities where they have had this kind of opportunity.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you said, sir, that if the funds are provided that hopefully they can hold out. How long are you talking about? How long can they hold out? In other words, how long do you feel this aid will be necessary to continue?

THE PRESIDENT: This aid that we have requested on an emergency basis from the Congress is anticipated to provide the necessary humanitarian effort and the necessary military effort to get them through the dry season, which ends roughly the latter part of June or the first of July.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, if I might, I am sure you have seen news accounts to the effect that the conservatives -- especially within your own party -- are considering starting a third party in 1976, and they are bolting.

I understand yesterday that a group of conservative Republican Senators met with you, and afterwards they came out and talked with reporters at the White House and told us they were unhappy with your policies and they thought you were going too far to the left. In fact, they said they wanted you to know that you could no longer take the right wing of your party for granted.

That being the case, sir, do you intend to go out and court conservative Republican support to woo them back for 1976, and do you think anything short of dropping Nelson Rockefeller from the ticket will do that?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me say the meeting that I had with about 11 very fine Republican Members of the United States Senate was a very, very frank discussion, and I think very constructive.

Some of them indicated that in certain areas they had disagreements with me. In other areas, they indicated a strong support for the position that I have taken on various issues.

It is my feeling that the Republican Party has to be a broad-based, wide spectrum party if it is going to be a viable force in the political situation in the United States.

I happen to believe that Nelson Rockefeller is doing a very fine job as Vice President, and if we can broaden the base of the Republican Party, I think we have an excellent chance to prevail in 1976.

My maximum effort will be in getting all elements of the Republican Party on the team, and I think in the final analysis, we will.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, as a follow up, can you really broaden that base without losing the right wing of your party?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I think we can.

In 1968 and 1972, that was achieved and we were successful. I think it can be done in 1976.

QUESTION: On Rule 22, when Mr. Rockefeller ruled, had you approved what he was doing beforehand? Do you agree with the ruling and do you agree with the assertion of some of the Senators you met with that it is going to make it much harder for your program to get by in the Senate with three-fifths rather than two-thirds?

THE PRESIDENT: I think we have to understand that the Vice-President occupies the position as presiding officer of the United States Senate under the Constitution. He has a constitutional responsibility in that regard.

I am in the Executive Branch of the Government. He, in that part of his responsibility, is in the Legislative Branch. He has the obligation under the Constitution to make a ruling, to preside in the United States Senate.

I think it is inappropriate or inappropriate, I should say, for me to tell him, as a member of the Legislative Branch in that capacity how he should rule. And therefore, I did not. I have had a number of discussions with the Vice-President as to my personal philosophy concerning the United States Senate. I happen to believe that the United States Senate ought to be a somewhat different legislative body than the House of Representatives, whereby a 51 percent vote, a majority can prevail.

But our founding fathers very wisely thought that the Senate ought to be a little different and they provided that the Senate should have other rules, other parliamentary procedures including the requirement of more than 51 percent to conduct its business under certain circumstances.

I expressed those views to the Vice-President, but I went no further, and I do not think it would have been appropriate for me to go any further.

QUESTION: To follow that question up, do you think it is going to be harder for you to get your programs through the Congress with this prospective change in the filibuster rule?

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THE PRESIDENT: I don't think it will be any more difficult to get the programs through. It might be more difficult in other ways but I do not think it will be more difficult to get the programs through.

QUESTION: Mr. President, some people who have visited former President Nixon in recent months have quoted him as saying he would like to, after his illness is over, become a major figure in the Republican Party again.

Do you foresee any time in the future when it would be beneficial for the Republican Party to have him re-emerge as a leader?

THE PRESIDENT: I think any comment that I make in that regard is inappropriate at the present time. Mr. Nixon is still recovering from a very serious illness and for me to speculate down the road, I think, is unwise at this time.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Secretary Simon said the other day that he thought the jobless rate, unemployment rate, could rise to as much as nine percent before things turned around.

Now, in view of this, would you be willing to go for a larger tax deduction? Would you be willing to raise it, say, \$10 billion or some other figure?

THE PRESIDENT: In the first place, I have doubts that it will go to nine percent. It might, but without commenting on whether it will or won't, if there is a need for a greater stimulant, I would certainly go for a greater tax reduction than for increased spending. I think that the tax reduction route is a lot more desirable than just increasing spending on some of these categorical programs or other programs that really do not help the individual as much as a tax reduction which would put money back in his pocket.

I believe that the program we have, as it appears to be moving through the Congress, is at this stage of the game moving in the right direction. The big problem is not the size of the tax reduction, but the slowness with which the Congress is acting on it and the failure of the Congress thus far to limit the tax reduction to something that can be enacted into law quickly.

What we need is speed and a figure of \$16 billion to \$19 billion in tax reduction. If we delay -- and I hope it is not -- then delay is more of a problem than the size.

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QUESTION: Sir, in the bill that came out of the House you really got a different kind of character to that bill than the one you proposed. There is a greater percentage going to lower income groups and yours would go more to middle and higher income groups.

Would you veto a bill if it got to your desk in the form it came from the House or how would you feel about the House bill?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think it is wise for me to speculate on what I would do with the House bill. It does have to go through the Senate committee; it does have to go through the Senate, itself; and then it has to go to conference and come down to me.

For me to speculate at this stage, I think, is very unwise.

I would like to add this, however: I agree with Secretary of the Treasury Simon, who testified yesterday or the day before, that there ought to be a larger increase for the middle income taxpayer. I think the House version of the bill was much too limited. It didn't give a sufficiently large rebate or tax reduction to the middle income taxpayers and those people, I think, deserve a break because in recent years, they have gotten a heavier and heavier burden imposed on them.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I am wondering if you agree, sir, with Leon Jaworski who feels that the time has now come for former President Nixon to tell the truth about Watergate?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think it is appropriate for me to give any advice to Mr. Nixon on that matter at this time. A fairly comprehensive story has been told in the impeachment hearings in the House, in the testimony of many, many people in the court here in the District of Columbia.

I think the proper place for any further discussion in this regard is in the court system of the United States.

QUESTION: What effect do you think last night's massacre in Tel Aviv will have to current Kissinger negotiations, and what advice would you give to Israel to counteract such terrorist attacks?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me answer the last first. I don't think it is appropriate for me to give any advice to Israel, or any other nation, as to what they should do in circumstances like that. I hope that the very ill-advised action -- the terrorist action -- in Israel or in Tel Aviv last night was absolutely unwarranted under any circumstances. I condemn it because I think it is not only inhumane but it is the wrong way to try and resolve the difficult problems in the Middle East.

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I would hope that that terrorist activity would not, under any circumstances, destroy the prospects or the possibilities for further peace accomplishments in the Middle East.

QUESTION: Mr. President, to follow up on that, have you considered asking Israel to become part of NATO?

THE PRESIDENT: I have not.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you sounded encouraged about the prospect for Cambodian aid. Can you give us an estimate of what you think the chances are now of it being passed?

THE PRESIDENT: They certainly are better than they were. I had a meeting this morning with Senator Sparkman and Senator Hubert Humphrey and Senator Clifford Case. They want to help. They say the prospects are 50-50. But if they are that, I think we ought to try and make the effort because I think the stakes are very, very high when you involve the innocent people who are being killed in Cambodia.

QUESTION: A follow-up. If the Congress does not provide the aid and the Lon Nol government should fall, would the country be in for any recrimination from this Administration? Would we have another "who lost China" debate, for example?

THE PRESIDENT: I first would hope we get the aid and the government is able to negotiate a settlement. I do not think -- at least from my point of view -- that I would go around the country pointing my finger at anybody.

I think the facts would speak for themselves.

QUESTION: Mr. President, from some of the remarks the Senators who met with you today made, they did not indicate they were quite in as much agreement as you indicated, but Senator Humphrey, for one, asked as part of a negotiated settlement that you spoke of if you would be willing to seek the orderly resignation of Lon Nol.

THE PRESIDENT: I do not believe it is the proper role of this government to ask the head of another state to resign. I said in my opening statement that we believe that the settlement ought to be undertaken and it is not one that revolves around any one individual. And I would hope that some formula, some individuals, on both sides, could sit down and negotiate a settlement to stop the bloodshed.

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QUESTION: A follow-up on that. Are you saying that the United States will support any government, no matter how weak or corrupt, in a situation like this?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not saying we would support any government. I am saying that we would support any government that we can see coming out of the present situation or the negotiated settlement.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, yesterday on unemployment you requested \$1.6 billion for public service jobs to run through mid-1976. Now, your advisers, meantime, keep predicting that the problem will improve in mid-1975, just a month or two from now.

How do you reconcile those two positions?

THE PRESIDENT: The requested additional manpower training funds that I requested will fully fund the authorized amount that was approved by the Congress last year. We believe that this amount is needed to take care of any potential contingencies.

We think there will be an improvement toward the end of this year, and certainly in the beginning of next year, on the unemployment. On the other hand, we think it is wise at this time to be prepared for any adverse developments.

QUESTION: You mentioned earlier it might go to 9. Are you revising upward the figure from 8.5?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I think I said I was not going to agree to any figure, but I did say that if we had any such development, the better way to solve it would be for a further tax cut rather than some of these additional spending programs.

The most important thing was to get the Congress to act affirmatively, quickly, on the tax bill. I am very disturbed with their lack of affirmative action as quickly as I think it should come.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, out of the OPEC summit meeting in Algiers today came a declaration that oil prices should be pegged to inflation and the prices they have to pay for the products they buy.

Do you think this kind of inflation indexing system is fair?

THE PRESIDENT: We are trying to organize the consuming nations, and we have been quite successful. I believe that once that organization has been put together--and it is well along--that we should sit down and negotiate any matters with the producing nations.

I personally have many reservations about the suggestion that has been made by the OPEC organization. I think the best way for us to answer that problem is to be organized and to negotiate rather than to speculate in advance.

QUESTION: Mr. President, things have been sort of piling up since you announced your \$52 billion prospective deficit. You have now postponed your tax proposal for March and April. You have put out \$2 billion for highways, another \$2 billion for relief jobs, and now the Congress has refused to put a ceiling on food stamps.

My question is this: Just how high do you think this \$52 billion deficit is going to go, and where do you think it is at this point?

THE PRESIDENT: The \$52 billion deficit was too high, in my judgment. We did our best to keep it down, and the Congress so far has added substantially to it by not approving the recommended rescissions and deferrals that I proposed.

I think I recommended in one group about a \$950 million rescission, or deferral, and Congress only approved about \$110 or \$120 million of that. They have, in addition, as you indicated, added about \$650 million in additional food stamp costs. I am disturbed.

I will continue to work trying to convince the Congress that a deficit of \$52 billion is too much, and anything above that is very, very bad. If they think the way to stimulate the economy is to blow the Federal budget, I think they are wrong.

I think the better procedure, if we need any additional stimulant, is through a tax cut.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much.

END (AT 8:02 P.M. EDT)