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THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESS CONFERENCE
OF
PHILIP C. HABIB
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR EAST ASIAN AND PACIFIC AFFAIRS

PRESS BRIEFING ROOM
THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON, D.C.

12:20 P.M. EDT
9:20 A.M. PDT

MR. HABIB: I have no opening statement. I thought it would be better, to suit your purposes, if we went right to questions.

Q How would the United States regard Mr. Lon Nol when he arrives here? As chief of state? As an important visitor?

MR. HABIB: Marshall Lon Nol, as you know, has gone to Indonesia for a rest. After that, it is presumed he will be stopping in Hawaii for medical treatment. As you will recall, Spencer, some time ago he had been treated there, and after that, he will probably be, as his desire, come on to the United States. It will be treated as not an official visit in that sense. It is at his request, and our people have been instructed to provide all the appropriate facilities, and we will do so. He remains, as you know, chief of state constitutionally in Cambodia.

Q May I ask you about Vietnam? What is the outlook from the American side as to where this North Vietnamese-Vietcong offensive is going to stop. Are they going to roll clear on to Saigon?

MR. HABIB: If you don't mind, that is one of those questions where I will take a little time to answer. Quite obviously, what you are seeing taking place in Vietnam is the massive military violation of the Paris agreements in such a manner that North Vietnamese regular forces have been committed all over the 1st Corps and 2nd Corps and have continued their operations in 3rd and 4th Corps.

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Where they are going to get to and how far they are going to get is a question that remains to be seen.

As of this moment, the 1st and 2nd Corps have been substantially overrun. Your question is how far is it going to go? I don't know. The question is, where will the South Vietnamese be able to stabilize their military lines.

I think you have got to go back a little ways to look at this thing in its proper perspective, and I am going to impose upon you a bit today for doing so.

Let's face it. If you take a look at the situation today in terms of North Vietnamese regular troops in South Vietnam, there are more North Vietnamese regular troops in South Vietnam today than there have ever been before.

There certainly are many more than at the time the Paris agreements were signed.

As best as we can tell, as many as five or six out of the eight North Vietnamese reserve divisions have been committed to the battle in South Vietnam.

If you look at the terms of the agreement that I tried to explain to some of you before, you know very well that the agreement that was signed solemnly -- a solemn agreement -- provided, among other things, not only that there would be a ceasefire, but that the North Vietnamese would not introduce new forces into South Vietnam, that weaponry could only be replaced on a one-for-one basis.

In fact, what has happened is that you have had gross violation of the agreement from the day it was signed. In the face of that gross violation of the agreement, we, in turn, have not been able since 1973 to be responsive to the breaches of the agreement as signed and endorsed by the other members -- signed by the North Vietnamese and endorsed by the other members -- at the Paris Conference.

Moreover, over a period of time, whereas the North Vietnamese had been able to introduce into South Vietnam greatly enhanced and modernized military equipment -- weaponry, ammunition of new varieties, more sophisticated -- whereas they have been able to do that, in fact, rather than being able to even meet the terms of the agreement for one-to-one, which permitted one-for-one replacement, there has been nothing like that flow of arms and material into South Vietnam for the defense of the Republic of Vietnam.

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So, what you are seeing is not simply something that happened in the last week or so. You are seeing, in effect, the cumulative results of these gross violations of the agreement on the part of the North Vietnamese and the inability to maintain that kind of response over time that would have been necessary to sustain the agreement.

North Vietnam has deliberately chosen to take this path of gross violation of the agreement. The evidence is clear as to what that has involved. In the past, it has been rather popular to say, "Oh well, both sides violated the agreement." That kind of equivalency is irrelevant, if not completely dishonest.

Of course, there were violations on both sides, but when you compare them in terms of their relative degree, the ability of the North to mount the kind of campaign that you are seeing today depended upon both the violations in fact, in spirit, and intent. Anybody who reads anything else into this thing is just blind to circumstances as they have been evolving for several years.

Yes, sir?

Q Are you suggesting that the collapse of the Saigon government is due primarily to these massive North Vietnamese violations and not to any kind of internal collapse in the Saigon government or the army?

MR. HABIB: I am suggesting it is a combination of many factors. As a matter of fact, I am trying to bring about just that perspective in the understanding of it.

I think if you are going to look at the situation, you have to look at it in total. It is true that only some of the South Vietnamese forces did not, as you put it, sort of melt away in front of this onslaught, but in order to understand the circumstances, the situation and the forces at work, you have got to go back to the physical presence of the North Vietnamese in total violation of the agreement.

Unless you are prepared to start from that point and work your way forward, I don't think you will have full comprehension of just what happened. In terms of exactly what did happen, you are just as good an analyst as I am.

I think the Secretary of Defense addressed a good deal of that yesterday in his press remarks. Quite clearly, what the South intended to do was to produce a strategic withdrawal in the face of this overwhelming force that was being put against it and its own judgment of its own capability.

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After all, that was a factor. Now that strategic withdrawal did not succeed, there is no question of it. All you have to do is look at what happened in the 1st and 2nd Corps.

Q What is the United States willing and able to do about this? I wish you would separate the answer into two phases; one, diplomatically, what is the United States willing and able to do about it, and apart from the diplomacy.

MR. HABIB: First, in terms of what the United States is able to do about it. As you know, the President did dispatch General Weyand to take a look at the military situation and to provide him with a careful assessment of the situation. The mission -- General Weyand will be providing that assessment to the President. I understand General Weyand will be returning the latter part of this week, but that you will have to get confirmed over at Defense.

When that assessment is completed and available, the President naturally will then make the decision as to what will be required.

Obviously, it is quite clear that the necessity and the need for resources for the South to defend itself will be greater. There is no question that the losses have been large, but moreover, and beyond that, the human tragedy that has been created with respect to the refugees is of such great dimension that it will require -- and naturally we would expect -- that the United States would contribute to the amelioration of that situation.

There will be consideration given -- careful consideration given -- to both the military and the economic humanitarian requirements of the situation. As far as your further question as to what can be done, I take it you mean on the diplomatic side.

As you recall, we anticipated the nature of the violations of North Vietnam's solemn word, and have for several years. The answer is they have disregarded their diplomatic obligations. They signed a solemn agreement. The Administration called particular attention to the danger in January. The President, the Secretary of State and other responsible, authoritative officials have been calling constant attention to these matters over the last several months, as you know.

The Administration is, however, not blind to reality and is not also ignorant of the nature of the North Vietnamese intentions and strategy. Quite obviously, what they decided to do was to go for the military blow that they have inflicted. This is not something that was created in two weeks. This is something that has been planned for some time. You cannot do this sort of thing in just a weekend of meetings and decision-making.

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They have positioned their forces. They have positioned their armaments. They have drawn their plans and they have taken the military course, as I said earlier, in gross violation of their solemn obligation. Any other word that one wants to apply to it is just sheer verbage.

Q Mr. Secretary, you have said you anticipated this for several years. It has only been two years since the Paris agreement was signed. Are you implying you never expected them to live up to their agreement in the first place?

MR. HABIB: I don't recall that. Did I say several years? I thought I said several months. I am sorry, I mean for several months.

Q That was my question you took off on. Could I ask you a follow-up? You spoke of the Paris accords prohibiting the reintroduction of the North Vietnamese. As I recall, it was worded there would be no foreign troops. The reason for that wording, of course, is diplomatic because they never would admit they ever had any troops down there, but the United States well knew why the wording was that way.

What I am asking is, at what point did you come to the realization that a blow of this size and extent was necessary? Several months ago, or a year ago?

MR. HABIB: Obviously, the present campaign -- let me take your question in two parts. First of all, the North Vietnamese know very well that the agreement provides that where there is nothing said specifically about the immediate withdrawal of the North Vietnamese forces that were then in the South, the agreement was quite specific that there could not be, could not be introduced North Vietnamese forces into South Vietnam. That was clearly understood and clearly stated.

As far as what has happened laterally, I think you have got to go back to this season's campaign. If you want to talk about this season's campaign, you have to go back to about December when, as I said earlier, after having positioned their forces and undoubtedly developed their campaign strategy, they began to probe and push militarily.

You recall at that time we called attention to that. That continued on over into the new year. Then, you have got the further movement. You began to get the movement of the reserve divisions. You began to get the North, for example, making it very clear that it was mobilizing. The signs of mobilization were clear.

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The launching of the latest onslaught was based upon the earlier probe and the earlier build-up. It is not hard to read the tea leaves as to what was happening when this was going on.

Q Can we go back to the question of before that, as to what the United States can do diplomatically. The other side has put forward once again its offer to negotiate without President Thieu and abide by the Paris agreements.

How much worth do you put into this, and what can be done in the way of negotiation?

MR. HABIB: That is someone to talk about abiding by the Paris agreement in the face of what I have characterized as gross violation -- gross violations have been going on for some time. They now have been raised to the highest point since the agreement was signed. To speak about returning, in terms of the Paris agreement, really requires a great deal of credulity on the part of anyone to accept that.

Q Does this mean that we are rejecting --

MR. HABIB: On the contrary. As you know, the United States has always felt the terms of the Paris agreement should be lived up to, that the terms of the Paris agreement are to be lived up to right now.

The North Vietnamese make it very clear that they are not prepared to live up to the terms of the Paris agreement by their actions. They can say things, they can talk about things that do not necessarily have to mean what they say or what they appear to be intended to mean.

When one speaks about the Paris agreement, one has to talk about what has happened to the Paris agreement. Are they prepared, in effect, to abide by the terms of the Paris agreement as it was when they signed it? Are they prepared to abide by the terms of the Paris agreement? There is no question that the Paris agreement does not allow them to do what they are doing. There is no basis within the Paris agreement for either the forces in the South that have been put there in violation of the agreement; the equipment that is in the South, which has been put there in violation of the agreement; and the use of those forces and equipment, which is in violation of the agreement.

There is nothing in the Paris agreement that permits North Vietnam to move its main forces clearly in violation of that agreement.

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Q What about the other part of the question?

MR. HABIB: What was the other part of the question?

Q It was about President Thieu.

MR. HABIB: What about him? Would you rephrase the question?

Q Is the United States continuing its full support to President Thieu?

MR. HABIB: This idea that the United States support this or -- the United States supports the government of the Republic of Vietnam. The President of that government is President Thieu. That is the answer to the question.

Q Mr. Habib, I am curious about the phrase you used earlier that it was clear that the United States would have to provide more -- I think it is fair to say, if I understand you correctly -- in both the military side and on the humanitarian side.

MR. HABIB: That is correct.

Q Are you talking about more than already requested for South Vietnam, more than the \$300 million requested in the supplemental?

MR. HABIB: I think the answer to that, of course, to be technical, will depend on the assessment that is provided by General Weyand on the mission and the President's determination. What I am doing is repeating what the Secretary of Defense said yesterday to the press, that he anticipated the requirements would be, of course, greater.

Q Greater than what?

MR. HABIB: Greater than the amount that was originally requested. That was the \$300 million supplemental.

Q So, you are talking about more than the \$300 million?

MR. HABIB: I am not stating that. I said that one can anticipate that possibility, in terms of the requirement of the situation, but I am not stating that. I am trying to be responsive to the question.

On the economic side, you will recall there was not any request on the economic side in terms of economic assistance for Vietnam beyond that which was appropriated. There undoubtedly will be required substantial funds for the care, feeding, relocation and shelter of the masses of refugees that have been generated by this campaign. Again, I am not stating, I am just anticipating. I am trying to be responsive to your question.

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Q Does your answer to those two questions, saying that we are obviously going to need more, is this based on the premise of the belief on your part and on the part of the United States government that South Vietnam can still be saved?

MR. HABIB: That, in the end, is going to be a question that the Vietnamese are going to decide. I want to make that very clear. The decision of the Vietnamese to defend themselves is their decision. It is our decision, or our Congressional and other organizational responsibilities, to determine what we are prepared to do to assist them in that process.

What I am saying to you is, if the situation develops as it appears to be developing, the requirements for resources -- which can only come basically, in large part, from the United States -- are going to probably be greater than had been anticipated.

Q You are talking about more arms for the South Vietnamese government when the question that seems to be posed by what we are seeing is the question of whether it is already collapsing and panic may be setting in in Saigon itself.

MR. HABIB: The answer to that is obviously that what the South Vietnamese are seeking to do, is to stabilize the military situation in Three and Four Corps in that area, which is apparently the next target of the North Vietnamese. The answer is they are already, in effect, in battle in some of those areas.

As you know, there has been considerable activity over in the Tay Ninh area up until this week and there has been some on the Northern and Northeastern edges of MR-3, Military Region 3.

Now, the question that you are posing is the question of a prescience, which I am afraid I cannot give you the answer, the answer is the test is there, whether they will be able to defend themselves.

The question that is being put to us, as I understand it, is are we prepared to provide the resources to permit them to defend themselves.

Q Mr. Habib, following on the relief question, there is a report of a scheduled meeting of relief agencies or relief officials here this afternoon. Can you tell us a little about that, what that is supposed to do?

MR. HABIB: Yes. I think Mr. Parker addressed the group yesterday. It was on the record. Mr. Parker, who is disaster coordinator, is meeting with the volunteer agencies, heads of the volunteer agencies, as I understand it, to look into the question of what might be done and what can be done in terms of the humanitarian requirements of the situation.

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Q Mr. Secretary, two questions. The first, is there any reasonable estimate at all in any range as to the amount of supplies and equipment that have been lost in the battle, abandoned in the battle?

MR. HABIB: We do not have one as yet, Murray. I expect that will be part of the assessment, which we are receiving. It is information of which we have got scattered bits and pieces. I hesitate to quote figures on that basis. It is quite obvious there have been massive losses.

I have seen some of the figures that have been used in some of the press reports. Those, to my knowledge, are not official figures. We will wait until we get them. When we have some clear idea what has been lost, we will then have a better idea also of what might be required.

Q Let me pursue that a moment, if I may. The estimates you refer to run up to and beyond \$1 billion. Is the Administration in a position now of seeking from Congress assistance in the range that will restore those losses, those massive losses?

MR. HABIB: You are coming back to the question of what is the assessment that General Weyand is going to bring back in terms of the situation and the requirements. I don't think it would be proper to simply assume, as you are trying to get the assumption to follow on that, that it will be a replacement of losses.

What will be looked at, I am sure, are the requirements of the situation. That is not to say that it is the replacement of everything that has been lost.

Q Frankly, for a week now, all the questions we have asked here about the diplomacy, about the military strategy, about the situation in South Vietnam, have produced a single answer: The Administration is waiting for the return of General Weyand.

MR. HABIB: How do you expect the Administration to make a judgment without the assessment which it instituted immediately upon the major campaign that has been mounted, took place?

Q Wasn't Admiral Gaylor in the area?

MR. HABIB: No, he just went through for a couple of days. He was in Cambodia. As you know, the President dispatched General Weyand specifically for this purpose, and this requires careful study. It has been given that careful study and, as I said earlier, I think the President will be receiving General Weyand's report before the end of the week.

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Q At the present time, then, there is no diplomatic activity that the United States has underway?

MR. HABIB: With respect to Indochina?

Q Yes.

MR. HABIB: You know, there you get back into the old business about what is diplomatic activity. There is a record. There is what has gone on previously. There is the agreement, itself, to which we call attention constantly. There are the statements and the positions expressed by the President and the Secretary.

I don't know what you mean by diplomatic. If you mean are we trying somehow or another to turn off the military campaign in favor of a return to agreement, the answer is, of course, we are. The equivalent answer, if you look at the other side of the coin, is what you are dealing with is fundamentally a decision by North Vietnam to take the military option and not the diplomatic option.

The diplomatic option was negotiated. The North Vietnamese are taking the military option, and you know and I know that when that military option is being exercised, it is exercised to the full.

What follows if the military situation is stabilized -- until it is stabilized, the North Vietnamese are embarked upon a campaign militarily. If the military situation stabilizes, will the North Vietnamese continue to embark upon a military campaign? That is a decision they will have to make.

Q The military option may run right through the center of Saigon.

MR. HABIB: That is your assessment at this point, Murray.

Q No, I am asking.

MR. HABIB: If one wants to get into hypothetical questions of what happens if it all caves in, it is really not the sort of thing I engage in. You know I wouldn't. Obviously, there is a grave military situation. Obviously, the requirements of the situation are for stabilization of the military situation. There is no question about that.

Q But are you saying the United States must wait until the military option is concluded?

MR. HABIB: No, of course not. I am not saying anything of the sort.

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Q Could I follow up on that?

MR. HABIB: I knew you would. (Laughter)

Q At the time of the Paris agreement there was also an international conference that was convened and a number of major powers, in effect, ratified those agreements. Murray asked you about diplomatic activity.

Why, in light of the North Vietnamese penchant for both diplomatic and military activity taking place at one and the same time, why hasn't the United States moved to reconvene that conference?

MR. HABIB: If you will recall, in January the United States wrote formally to the participants in that conference and pointed out what was going on and called their attention to it. We did not get much of a response.

Q You never asked for a reconvening of the conference.

MR. HABIB: No, we did not at that time.

Q Why?

MR. HABIB: Marvin, North Vietnam has taken a course which is in complete and total violation of anything that can be construed as the diplomatic solution that was solemnly agreed to.

While they are embarked upon that course, they show no signs whatsoever of taking any serious steps to abide by the terms of that solemn agreement. You asked me a direct question, whether we have actually called the reconvening, and the answer to that question is no, not at this time.

Q My follow-up question was why, and you have said the North Vietnamese are now pursuing a military course which is obvious to anybody, and I am asking why the United States is not doing anything?

MR. HABIB: The answer is quite obvious. The feeling is until the military situation is stabilized, they will not be diverted from that course. That is the historical record with this kind of a situation.

In any event, that does not mean in any way that we, ourselves, abrogate, disregard, or lose any desire to see the terms of the agreement reinstituted and re-established. How that comes about and through what course it comes about, I think there again that is one of those things that a little bit of time might demonstrate.

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Q Mr. Habib, you have not blamed Congress at all.

MR. HABIB: No, I have not said a word about anything, about blaming anybody. I tried to describe a situation. I don't know what you mean. Do you want me to put blame? If I am going to put blame, I am going to put the blame one place. I will put the blame on North Vietnam.

Q Almost every ranking American official has blamed the Congress, in part, for what is happening in South Vietnam, including the Secretary of Defense last night. The fact that you are not raises a question in my mind as to whether the Administration is now changing its tactic, or do you continue to place a good part of the blame on the Congress for not appropriating the money?

MR. HABIB: Let me describe the situation. I don't like to use phrases like "blame the Congress." That is your phrase. I described the situation --

Q That is the situation, Mr. Habib, that has developed.

MR. HABIB: I will repeat it to you again. Let me describe it to you. You said I have a right to answer the question. Let me answer it my way.

I stated three elements of the situation and its evolution. I stated, first of all, the gross violations of the agreement on the part of the North Vietnamese. I stated, second of all, that since 1973, we have been unable to respond to those gross violations, and I have said, finally, we have not been able to provide the resources necessary to have over time -- not speaking about last month or last week -- over time we have not provided the resources which we are giving the South Vietnamese every reason to believe they would receive, within our constitutional processes.

You could read that any way you want, but that is the way I describe the situation.

Q Mr. Secretary, if I may follow up. While you have been unable to provide this, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, for their part, have been supplying North Vietnam rather substantially. What efforts have you made to try to get them to stop that?

MR. HABIB: You know, there was nothing in the agreement that prevented them from supplying. What the agreement provides is that replacements in South Vietnam could only be up to a one-to-one basis. The violation of the agreement resides in North Vietnam sending to South Vietnam military resources beyond the one-to-one replacement.

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As to what steps one might or might not take to stop it, one would have hoped that there would have been a degree of prudence with respect to such things, but it is quite obvious that North Vietnam has received all that it has needed to mount this massive campaign.

Moreover, you have got to go back again and think of it over a period of time, that the North Vietnamese in North Vietnam have always had substantial supplies. What the agreement provided was they could not move them to the South. When they move them to the South, then they are in violation of the agreement.

Q Then, are you saying it is all right?

MR. HABIB: I am talking in terms of the legal requirements of the agreement. I just wanted to make it very clear I was not accusing anybody of violating the agreement by the shipment of supplies to North Vietnam. That is not contrary to the agreement.

As I said, one would have hoped it would have been exercised with a greater degree of prudence, but it was not exercised.

Q If it is not a violation of the Paris agreement of 1973, isn't it a violation of the U.S.-Soviet detente in 1972?

MR. HABIB: I don't know whether you would go that far. I don't think we are quite prepared to draw that sweeping a conclusion.

Q Following Jim McCarthy's question -- and picking up the word you used before "prescience" -- I want to ask you what the motivation is for the desire to rush military arms to South Vietnam now? Does it grow out of the conviction the arms will make a critical difference on the part of ARVN to defend whatever is left of South Vietnam?

MR. HABIB: Are you referring to this air shipment? Is that what you are referring to?

Q -- or whatever they will get in the way of additional resources, or is it a symbolic reply to the allegations coming from Vietnam about American betrayal?

MR. HABIB: I don't think it is symbolic in that sense. I think it certainly, in terms of immediate shipment, has a certain psychological significance. It also has a certain practical, material significance. As you know, there has been substantial material loss, ordinance. As I recall, the first air shipment that went in was principally Howitzers, 105's or 155's, I am not sure which. I think it was a little of both, but it is not intended to be that kind of an answer.

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Quite obviously, the South Vietnamese are concerned, and that concern is not concealed as to the ability and willingness of the United States to supply the military resources that are necessary in the current circumstance.

The Administration has made clear, as far as the Administration is concerned, they have the will, and hope that the Congress will appropriate the funds that will permit these things to go into works.

We are still operating on those obligational authorities that exist under the original appropriation. As you will remember, that appropriation was spaced out on a quarterly basis so that supplies could continue to roll in. What you are seeing moving in now are supplies that stem from that original obligational authority.

Q Mr. Secretary, may I follow up? What plans does the United States have, if any, for the evacuation of Americans from Saigon? At what point would you start evacuating Americans from Saigon? Is there any emergency plan? That is the first question.

MR. HABIB: Let me answer that first, if I may. In every country of the world where there is evidence of a struggle, we have what is known as an emergency evacuation plan. That is a universal plan. So, the answer to your question is what plans do we have? We always have such plans for all countries in the world, what we call our E&E plan.

Q Have you started consideration of the possibility of evacuation?

MR. HABIB: The only thing that is going on at this point, as you probably have read in the press, is that some of the dependents on a case-by-case basis, by choice, are permitted to leave if they so wish, but there has been no triggering of any evacuation.

While of course, we have taken our people out of the areas along the coast that fell within the last week or so, our people got out of Danang, our people got out of Nha Trang and Dilot and Qui Nhon. Those are all parts of what you might call our local evacuation plan, but beyond that, the E&E plans are there. They are always there. They are there for every country.

You had a second question. Let's take the second part of the question.

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Q Where, specifically, would the United States -- what would the South Vietnamese army have to do to convince the United States that it had, in fact, stabilized the military situation and therefore, would be --

MR. HABIB: The evidence has to be clear on the grounds.. At the present time, the defense of Three or Four Corps are the heart of the matter, and obviously, the heart of the heart of the matter is the area around Saigon. That is the area one has to now watch. We will have to see the capability and we will have to see the results.

Q Mr. Habib, if we could examine a little further your premise that one reason for the present situation is our inability to provide adequate resources to South Vietnam to meet its requirements.

Over the past three years, the United States has given \$6.4 billion in military aid to South Vietnam, and during the same period -- according to the intelligence community -- the Soviet Union and Communist China have given North Vietnam \$1.5 billion in military aid. I am quoting, sir, from the intelligence community report.

I think the question arises out of that, that with four times, five times as much aid from the United States why has this not been sufficient to meet the military requirements of South Vietnam?

MR. HABIB: It has always been true that the requirements of an extended defense line are much greater in terms of the resources necessary than the requirements for an attacking force that could pick or choose its areas.

What was happening in Vietnam over the years -- and again it is not a question of what happened last week, John. I am not addressing that in response to your question. I think, over the years, what you have had is that extensive, defensive structure of every line of communication, every province, every province capital, every district capital with a few exceptions, an attempt for a total defensive posture.

When the level of assistance began to decline -- and it did, as you know, substantially in fiscal 1975 and began in 1974 -- then it became a choice as to whether or not they could still sustain that kind of total, overall defensive posture.

It was quite obvious that the strategic decision that was made by the Vietnamese government was to make that withdrawal. The tactical failure of the withdrawal in the 1st and 2nd Corps is another matter, but the strategic decision taken to begin that withdrawal was based upon an inability to provide the mobility and the resources that are necessary to exercise that kind of overall defensive strategy.

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That is not surprising. The defense, for example, of an outlying post depends on the ability to re-enforce it. You cannot have total strength in every spot when the other fellow could pick his spot to hit you.

So, the defense of an outlying post depends on the mobility to get there, and it depends upon firepower. If you don't have the mobility and you don't have the firepower, you then have to change your strategy. They tried to do so, and it did not work, at least in 1st and 2nd Corps.

Q Mr. Habib, to sum up on Doug Kiker's questions, we realize there is an emergency evacuation plan. I understand there are about 650 U.S. Marines on those Navy ships that are lying off the coast of Vietnam. Are they involved in an evacuation plan?

MR. HABIB: Do you mean the ships that just went in for the evacuation of refugees?

Q Yes.

MR. HABIB: I don't know what the figures are for the number of Marines on the ships that went in.

Normally, ships carry a small complement of Marines for ship's duty, but for that, you had better address that to the Defense Department.

Quite obviously, that kind of question, in terms of how many are there and what they are doing, ought to be addressed to the Defense Department. I am not competent to answer that.

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Q Could you tell us if the South Vietnamese have enough divisions remaining in fighting strength to stabilize the military situation?

MR. HABIB: I would rather not go into the order of battle at the moment. I certainly am not going to make any judgments. That is going to be put to the test. I am not going to assume that they can't do it, which I think some of the questions have indicated. I think that that is something that they are going to have to determine out of their own strength and spirit.

Q Mr. Secretary, in view of the resistance of the American public and Congress to the \$300 million already asked, where does that leave you when you talk about anticipating the possibility of needing more than \$300 million?

MR. HABIB: The question is one which will have to be put and addressed -- the circumstances will have to be described, the requirements will have to be justified. It will have to go through the process that we normally go through in these things, and then in its wisdom the Congress will decide. That is the process, and it is one that is going to be gone through.

Q Has the process started?

MR. HABIB: The Congress is adjourned at the moment.

Q No, I mean the process of the Administration.

MR. HABIB: Yes, in terms of assessing the requirements, as I have been accused of as has been going on (Laughter) for a while, and the answer is yes, that is exactly what the assessment -- among the other things, that is one of the things the assessment concludes, among other things, the assessment of the situation as well as the requirement. I think that is what the President charges.

Q In view of what you describe as North Vietnam's gross violation of the Paris agreement, has this country or has South Vietnam any obligation to obey that agreement any further?

MR. HABIB: Under normal international conventions -- I think there was some sort of convention signed in Geneva some years ago -- obviously, when one signatory to an agreement violates the agreement, the other signatory is then free to do what he wishes.

MORE

There is no intention on the part of the United States to abrogate the agreement. On the contrary, as we have tried to make clear, as the President and the Secretary have, the United States look to North Vietnam's gross violation agreement as at the heart of the matter.

We would not take that position if we thought in terms of the nonapplicability to the agreement. How much longer do we want to go?

Q Cambodia, with Lon Nol having left, do you see any possibility of any negotiation?

MR. HABIB: If you ask that of the Cambodian government, the government in Phnom Penh, that is their most profound desire, and their most profound hope, and maybe their most profound prayer. It certainly is ours.

The President has always spoken for some time now -- it is not something that happened last week -- of the desirability of a compromise settlement. Is that possible in the present circumstance. There again, that is one of those things that is going to be put to the test.

There is no lack of desire on the part of the people in Phnom Penh, from everything we know, to seek a resolution of the conflict in which the killing stops and somehow or other Cambodians decide what happens then. It would not be from lack of wanting on their part, but it may be from lack of wanting on the part of the Khmer Rouge.

You obviously have a situation there where the Khmer Rouge have a military bit in their teeth, and they keep pounding away. Indiscriminate rocket bombing of Phnom Penh is not a military -- in the old days, we would call that terror bombing, but those phrases have gone out of fad now.

Q You described the military situation as grave in South Vietnam. Would you describe the political situation as grave, and can you give us your assessment of the political situation?

MR. HABIB: I don't think it would serve any useful purpose for me to comment on the internal situation now, Jerry. After all, I am on the record and I am a government official. I just don't think it would serve any useful purpose for me to comment on the internal political situation in Vietnam.

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Q Mr. Secretary, a two-part question. Is there anything that President Thieu has conveyed to the United States that conveys any feeling on his part that the United States has sold out or betrayed South Vietnam? That is the first question. The second one is, giving the portrait you have just given us of the fidelity of the North Vietnamese to a solemn agreement, did the United States genuinely believe, when it signed that agreement on January 27, 1973, that the North Vietnamese would in fact honor the agreement as it was written?

MR. HABIB: The answer to the first part of your question is President Thieu has not communicated any such feeling. On the contrary, whatever feeling that has been communicated has been the confidence that the United States will not let South Vietnam down.

With respect to our attitude toward the agreement when it was signed, quite obviously the agreement was negotiated in good faith. We signed it in good faith, and we had expected it to be carried out, in the major sense, in good faith.

Obviously, in circumstances in which that agreement was signed, nobody expected perfection with respect to every clause and every cease-fire line and every point within it. In terms of its gross terms, in terms of its gross requirements, in terms of the general thrust that you set the military war aside and you then pursue the continuing controversy through measures other than military, there is no question we had a right to expect that.

After all, it was not only solemnly signed, but it was endorsed by a convocation, including the major powers. As far as we were concerned and as far as the South Vietnamese were concerned, that has always been the basic thrust of the policy.

I am not one of those who will tell you the government in Saigon never violated the agreement in one respect. You know that is not true, and they know it is not true, and I know it is not true, but in terms of the gross requirements of the agreement, the overall purposes of that agreement, there is no question that they had nothing to lose by abiding by it.

But the North Vietnamese, from the beginning, began the build-up in violation. You would have hoped, we went at them in the beginning and said knock it off, in effect, or this is a violation of the agreement.

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You will recall the Secretary met in 1973 twice in respect to the violations of the agreement, but the build-up went on. It took its ultimate evolution in the current campaign.

Q Mr. Habib, back on relief, can you tell us what the niceties of it are in terms of the --

MR. HABIB: Requirements?

Q -- well, in terms of the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of displaced people in the Southern part of Vietnam, whether the United States and other relief agencies, relief organizations, can somehow get relief supplies to those people in the areas that have already been overrun or whether we have just written them off now?

MR. HABIB: In the first place, we would hope that those people would be permitted to get out, to exercise their rights of freedom of movement. Some of you might recall that Article 13 of the Declaration of Human Rights gives people that right, the right of freedom of movement, so we would certainly support the desire of those people to pick the place in which they would like to be.

Now, we will do what we can to provide the assistance to those to whom we can get it. We are already embarked on that project. I think Mr. Parker explained that to you. We will be seeking additional resources for that purpose, and you have already seen a clear indication that that is something that, in the traditional American experience, not only our people expect of us, but everybody expects of us, and I know we will not disappoint them in that regard.

We have also, of course, supported the South Vietnamese in their appeal to the United Nations and other countries in the world to provide the assistance that will be necessary, and some countries are already coming forward, not only with respect to the evacuation of the refugees, but with respect to their care, their feeding and their relocation.

It is going to take great sums. There are more than just a few hundred thousand people involved. No one knows how many will be able, in any event, to get to that position where you can treat them and care for them.

Spencer?

MORE

Q Mr. Secretary, you spoke of the earnest desire of the United States to see a settlement in Cambodia. The settlement would be between what parties? Who would represent the Khmer Rouge? Would that be Norodom Sihanouk's coalition, or what?

MR. HABIB: The United States has made it clear, and I will refer you back to a conference we had here not long ago, and if you want the precise wording, you really better look at that piece of paper, but as I recall, what we said at that time was something to the effect that it is not a question of personalities that is involved.

The United States is not seized of that problem, nor are the Cambodians in Phnom Penh. They have made it clear again and again that no one is any obstacle to peace. The obstacle to peace in Cambodia, the obstacle to a stopping of the shooting in Cambodia, is the unwillingness of the Khmer Rouge to have anything to do with anything except what they are doing.

They won't talk to anybody. There is no attempt at finding a way out other than at the end of a gun. All you have to do is to read the impassioned appeal of the authorities in Phnom Penh to realize that the war does not go on because they want it to.

Thank you very much, gentlemen.

END (AT 1:10 P.M. EDT)
(AT 10:10 A.M. PDT)