

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

APRIL 16, 1975

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT
AND
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION
TO THE
AMERICAN SOCIETY OF NEWSPAPER
EDITORS ANNUAL CONVENTION

THE SHOREHAM HOTEL

1:26 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: President Hays, distinguished editors and guests:

I am very, very pleased to be with you today and to have this opportunity to continue a dialogue which has been my pleasure in many parts of the country with many of you in various regional meetings during the past few months.

Those exchanges and the one which will begin shortly are exceedingly valuable to me in providing an insight into the attitudes and the concerns of the people who are your readers and my constituents.

Before answering the questions put to me by the distinguished panel, let me add, if I might, a few comments to the speech that I made to the Congress last Thursday night, and to the American people.

Let me, if I might, express in broad terms some deep beliefs that I have.

First, I firmly believe that the United States must play a very major role in world affairs in the years ahead. It is a great and difficult responsibility, but it is one, in my judgment, that our Nation must continue to have.

This has been my conviction, going back to my first political campaign in the fall of 1948. It was my conviction when I took my first oath of office on January 3, 1949. For a period of better than 25 years in the Congress—as a Member of the House, and part of that time as a leadership role in the minority party—it has been my conviction.

As long as I am President of the United States I will seek to carry on that very important responsibility of our country. I believe to be successful in this effort, this endeavor, the Congress and the President must work together.

MORE

It is my belief that if we are to be successful in the achievement of success in the area of foreign policy, the American people, to the degree that they can, must be united.

I also believe that our foreign policy, if you look at the record -- at least during the period that I was honored to be a part of our Government in the Congress or in the Executive Branch -- that our foreign policy has been a successful one.

Of course, there has been some instances where we did not achieve all that we sought, in some cases because the circumstances were well beyond our control. In a few instances where we have not been as successful as we would have liked, I think we self-inflicted some problems that helped to bring that unfortunate result.

I also believe to maintain peace and to insure it, certainly in the future, the United States must remain strong militarily. We must have a broad, strong, well-led military establishment -- and I include in that an intelligence system that can be extremely helpful to me and to Presidents in the future.

I believe also that we must work with friend and foe alike. We have many, many friends throughout the world. We have some potential adversaries and we have some that are true adversaries. But if we are to achieve what we all want, we have to work with all.

It is my strong belief that we can achieve unity at home. I see no reason why the Congress and the President cannot work together. That doesn't mean that all 535 Members of the House and Senate will agree with me, but I can assure you that what I have said on more than one occasion, I believe, and I will try to implement and I will work with the Congress, and I know many, if not all, in the Congress will try to work with me.

If we do get this unity at home and if we do develop a closer relationship between the President and the Congress, I think we can continue a successful foreign policy in building a better world and achieving, on a more permanent basis, peace for all.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Reston?

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, two points. There is a story on the ticker this morning out of Geneva that the Cambodian government has asked for a cease-fire and that this information has been passed to Prince Sihanouk in Peking. Could you tell us anything about that, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Reston, I just received a note from one of my staff members, Ron Nessen, indicating that we had gotten the information after I had left the White House to the effect that the Cambodian government ~~has communicated with Sihanouk indicating that the Cambodian government will work with the Khmer Rouge to try and negotiate a settlement.~~

It is my recollection, from a quick look at that information that was given to me at the luncheon table, that Prince Sihanouk is in no position to really achieve or accomplish the results that we all want, namely, a negotiated settlement in that unfortunate situation.

I can only say from our point of view we will help in any way we can to further negotiations to end that conflict.

QUESTION: On that same point, could I ask you whether you have been in touch with the North Vietnamese about a cease-fire in South Vietnam or with any other government to try to bring that about?

THE PRESIDENT: Over a period of time, we have communicated with all of the signatories of the Paris accords, which were signed in January of 1973. The efforts that we have made are broad and comprehensive, and when I say we have indicated our feelings to all signatories, of course, that includes the North Vietnamese.

Mr. Funk?

QUESTION: Mr. President, is the United States in direct contact now, in a situation of negotiation, with the North Vietnamese for a cease-fire around Saigon?

THE PRESIDENT: We are not in direct negotiations in that regard.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. President, when a delegation of the American Society of Newspaper Editors was in China, the last time around there was considerable emphasis placed by the Chinese leaders, leading all the way from Premier Chou on down, that no firm relationship with the United States was possible until Taiwan, so to speak, was taken out of the picture and placed under Chinese rule.

You are going back to China. Is that on your agenda?

MORE

THE PRESIDENT: The relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China, which was reopened several years ago, is predicated on the Shanghai communique. This relationship is continuing, I would say, on schedule.

I am going back to the People's Republic of China late this fall. I was there for about two weeks in June and July of 1972. I would say that no firm agenda for that forthcoming meeting has been established. So, I am not in a position to comment directly on the question that you ask.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you have reaffirmed your confidence in the present American foreign policy, but I wonder if you could expand on that just a little bit.

Are we committed to containing Communism around the world? Are we committed to a heavy program of economic aid? Are we committed to a heavy program of military aid? Will we get into armed intervention in desperate cases?

THE PRESIDENT: We are committed to a furtherance of a policy of detente with the Soviet Union. I think that policy is in our mutual interests. It won't solve all the problems where either we or they are involved, but it has helped to reduce tensions.

It has helped in other ways where our joint cooperation could be helpful. We do, as a country, at least while I am President, expect to continue our relationship with Western Europe, with NATO.

We hope to strengthen it. We hope to eliminate some of the current problems, such as the problem between Greece and Turkey at the present time over Cyprus. We do expect to continue working in the Middle East, which includes some economic aid, some military assistance for various countries in that area of the world.

I think we have an obligation to continue to have a presence in the Pacific, in Latin America, in Africa. It is my judgment that in each of these cases we will probably continue both economic and military assistance on a selective basis.

I am not saying this is the containment of Communism. It is a furtherance of the policy of the United States aimed at our security and the maintenance of peace on a global basis.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, in response to Mr. Kirkpatrick's question, you mentioned a policy of detente in an affirmative way. The Chinese and Russian military aid to the North Vietnamese has been placed approximately \$1.5 billion.

My question is, doesn't that or does that violate the spirit of detente, and if so, of what purpose is detente?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it is worthwhile to point out that none of the signatories to the Paris accords have sought to enforce the violations* of those accords, including, of course, the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union.

In the agreement that was signed in Paris in January of 1973, the United States, as part of its agreement with South Vietnam, agreed to supply replacement war materiel to give economic aid.

The Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, I assume, made the same commitment to North Vietnam.

It appears that they have maintained that commitment. Unfortunately, the United States did not carry out its commitment in the supplying of military hardware and economic aid to South Vietnam.

I wish we had. I think if we had, this present tragic situation in South Vietnam would not have occurred.

I don't think we can blame the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China. In this case, if we had done with our ally what we promised, I think this whole tragedy could have been eliminated.

Nevertheless, we hope to and are working through the countries that are a part or were a part of the Paris accords to try and achieve a cease-fire, and will continue to do so.

MORE

* Word should be "provisions"

QUESTION: On that point, you have asked for more than \$700 million worth of military aid. There is some obvious psychological and symbolic reasons for simply asking, but militarily speaking, if you could get the package through Congress and get it to South Vietnam, would it militarily do any good at this point?

THE PRESIDENT: I am absolutely convinced if Congress made available \$722 million in military assistance in a timely way by the date that I suggested, or sometime shortly thereafter, the South Vietnamese could stabilize the military situation in Vietnam today.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you keep talking about commitments and promises, and we are getting hung up on these words. In the light of this controversy, why should the Thieu-Nixon correspondence not be released?

THE PRESIDENT: It is not the usual custom for correspondence between heads of state, as I understand it, to be released. I can say from my own experience, not referring to the correspondence to which you refer, that if it is expected that such correspondence will be public, I think on some occasions, or in some instances, you would have to compromise on what you would say. I think that would be true of any correspondence that I received from any other head of state.

If you are going to have a frank, free exchange, I think it has to be between the heads of states.

Now, I have personally reviewed the correspondence to which you refer between President Nixon and President Thieu and I can assure you that there was nothing in any of those communications that was different from what was stated as our public policy.

The words are virtually identical, with some variation, of course, but the intent, the commitments are identical with that which was stated as our country's policy and our country's commitment.

QUESTION: Sir, on that question of your trip to Red China that Mr. Isaacs raised, it seems that down the road it has been speculated that the policy or the purpose of detente is to establish normal diplomatic relations with a country that you described last Thursday as having one-quarter of the population of the world.

That would assume the establishment of an Embassy in Peking, which would automatically assume the de-recognition of some kind of Taiwan. If that is in the cards, what kind of guarantees would you seek, what kind of quid pro quo would you seek from Peking to insure the continued existence of Taiwan?

MORE

THE PRESIDENT: I honestly don't believe that I should discuss, under these circumstances, any of the agenda or any of the details of the continuation of our relations with the People's Republic of China.

We have excellent relations, as I am sure you know, with the Republic of China. We value that relationship. We are concerned, of course, and will continue to be concerned about the Republic of China's security and stability. And it doesn't seem to me at this time in this forum that I should discuss any negotiations that might take place between the United States and the People's Republic of China.

QUESTION: ~~It~~ Is our policy for the continued existence and guarantee of the defense of Taiwan. Is that our continuing policy?

THE PRESIDENT: I said, and if I might I would more or less repeat it, we do value that relationship between the United States and the Republic of China. I think that is best indicated by the high level delegation that I sent for the funeral services of Chiang Kai-shek. I believe that having sent Vice President Rockefeller there, with the others that were included, is a clear indication that we consider our relationship, our cooperation with the Republic of China, a matter of very, very great importance to us.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you referred to the tragic situation in Vietnam. It seems to many of us that it flows in part from what is obviously a profound credibility gap between the majority of American citizens and all of the various arms of what we can call the society's establishment.

I include the press in this unease which grips the American people and certainly it is clear that this Administration is regarded by many in the society as uncertain, inconsistent and even confused.

My question, sir, is whether the reports coming to you match this picture that I described in any way?

THE PRESIDENT: If I understand the question, I can -- (Laughter)

QUESTION: I can make it clearer, perhaps.

THE PRESIDENT: Why don't you make it crystal clear? (Laughter)

QUESTION: Sir, the Administration is regarded by many in the American electorate as inconsistent, uncertain and confused.

MORE

THE PRESIDENT: I categorically deny that we are.
(Laughter)

I must say that if that is the perception, this is not the first Administration that has had that problem.
(Laughter)

I don't think we are inconsistent and confused in an economic policy. I don't think we are inconsistent and confused on an energy policy. And I don't believe, under any circumstances, that we are inconsistent and confused on foreign policy.

MORE

I would be glad to take them one by one, if you would like me to set forth in detail, but I can assure you that the policies in each of those three major areas are integrated, are fully understood and, in my judgment, are the policies that are in the best interests of the United States.

One of the reasons why I do travel around the country -- and I have been in five or six areas where we have had press conferences, met with newspaper, radio television people -- is to make sure that they get from me and from my Administration the facts, straightforward, firsthand.

If those facts are presented, as we seek to do, I can assure you that the public will be convinced that they are not inconsistent and confused. We intend to continue those policies and that program.

QUESTION: Mr. President, does Secretary Simon have a future in the Ford Administration, or is he going to leave over some policy differences in the economic sphere?

THE PRESIDENT: I have asked Secretary Simon to stay, and he has agreed to stay.

QUESTION: Mr. President, to pick up Mr. Isaac's question, are we fighting inflation or are we fighting recession, and when did we ~~make~~ make this transition? (Laughter)

THE PRESIDENT: We are fighting both, and if you go back to the economic summit meetings that we had last September, I think you will find that we said we had a problem in both areas, but in September of 1974, because we were then suffering from 12 to 14 percent inflation on an annual rate, we felt a greater emphasis had to be placed in trying to lick inflation.

At the same time, we fully recognized that there were certain potential dangers with the economic situation, that there were some signals that a recession was moving in on our economy.

In January, when I gave the State of the Union Message and concentrated on the economy and on energy, the situation had changed; inflation was to be less of a problem.

At that time, the rate of inflation, if I recollect, was roughly 9 percent. There had been some improvement.

MORE

On the other hand, we had had tremendous layoffs, a decided increase potentially in the field of unemployment, and so we had to change the emphasis.

I still believe that we have to face the problems of inflation. The rate of inflation, according to the last three reports, the CPI figures indicate were at about 7.2 percent on an annual basis. We have another figure coming out Friday.

I am optimistic it is going to be better, but even if it is better, say the rate of 5 to 6 percent, that is too high, and we are going to do something about it.

On the other hand, we have 8.7 unemployment. That is too high, and we are going to do something about that, and we are encouraged, but it is a two-pronged problem and our policies are aimed at achieving success in both instances. I don't think you can ignore one and overemphasize the other.

QUESTION: Mr. President, going back again to Isaac's question, does it ever occur to you late in the morning that maybe it is the press that is confused and inconsistent? (Laughter)

THE PRESIDENT: Scotty, I think you know me well enough to know that under no circumstances would I make that allegation. (Laughter)

QUESTION: Mr. President, I have a question relating to off-shore oil drilling. We had quite a presentation this morning on energy, and as part of your goal of energy independence for the United States by 1985, the Interior Department is planning to open the Outer Continental Shelf off Southern California to oil exploration at the end of this year and beginning of next year and to full drilling in 1979.

There are about nine to 16 billion barrels of oil out there. Nevertheless, Senators Cranston and Tunney and local officials are saying we don't want you to go this fast because you have not allowed Congress and the people in these areas enough input into these plans.

In fact, the City of Los Angeles is going to sue, I think, if you don't delay the Interior Department's hearings in May, to block those hearings.

My question is, is it still your Administration's belief that those oil reserves off Southern California must be tapped according to the present Interior Department timetable, and that delay would be harmful to the best interests of the United States as a whole?

MORE

THE PRESIDENT: This Administration believes that we must develop the Outer Continental oil fields on all of our coasts -- in Alaska, on the Eastern Seaboard, in the Gulf and off our West Coast. Those potential oil fields are exceedingly important, all of them, to our better invulnerability to a foreign oil cartel decision.

The facts are that in 1974 our domestic production of oil was roughly ten million barrels per day and our foreign oil imports were roughly six million barrels per day. In the short span of less than six months, our domestic production has gone down to about nine million barrels per day, and our dependency on foreign oil imports has gone up to about seven million barrels per day.

The situation is going to get worse, not better, unless we find a way to develop all domestic sources of energy, including the Outer Continental Shelf.

I get very concerned when I see the dangerous trend of our growing dependence and worsening dependence on overseas shipments of oil when at the same time I see some actions that you have indicated that might be taken to preclude the Federal Government from developing Outer Continental sources of oil, when I see other actions of individuals, or groups, or units of Government trying to slow down, and in some instances, stop the installation, and the production of nuclear power plants, when I see other actions in one way or another -- and I don't challenge their motives, I challenge whether it is wise from our Nation's future strength to handicap our development of a sound energy program, which is in our national interest.

I just believe that the United States, the Federal Government, has to proceed according to law in the development of our Outer Continental oil resources on all of our shores, not just in California.

QUESTION: Then I presume that we can assume that the timetable will be adhered to as far as the Outer Continental Shelf off Southern California?

THE PRESIDENT: The timetable will be adhered to, but we will strictly abide by the laws of this country. As far as I know, there is no change in that timetable.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, there have been some conflicting news stories out of Vietnam about the possible, if it is necessary, evacuation of not only Americans but of South Vietnamese nationals from Saigon. Is there any plan or policy about such evacuation?

THE PRESIDENT: I have ordered the evacuation of all nonessential U.S. personnel in South Vietnam and we are phasing down on a daily basis such U.S. personnel who have no responsibilities, either for the Government or for whatever other purpose they are there.

The present plan is to keep those there who have a position of responsibility, a meaningful job. I am not in the position to speculate as to how many that will be, or when there might be a change in the situation.

I think it is too fluid at this moment to make any categorical comment.

QUESTION: That is speaking about Americans, and I think we understand that. But is there any policy about the potential evacuation of South Vietnamese?

THE PRESIDENT: Excuse me. In my speech last Thursday, I indicated there are a number of South Vietnamese who, over a period of almost two decades, have stood with us in various official capacities -- long-time employees of the Federal Government, our Government, who have been dedicated to the cause that not I, but a number of Presidents, have pursued.

I think we have an obligation to them. To the extent that I can, under the law, or hopefully if the law is clarified, I think we have a responsibility to them. But I don't think I ought to talk about an evacuation. I hope we are in a position where we can clarify or stabilize the situation and get a negotiated settlement that wouldn't put their lives in jeopardy.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you have talked a great deal about the moral obligation of this country to provide more military arms for South Vietnam. But what about the moral obligation to the suffering people of that country, the moral obligation to end that war?

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Reston, the agreement which was signed, I think, by 12 nations in January of 1973 in Paris -- and I was there, I saw the signing -- was accomplished with the expectation that that war would end.

If the agreement had been lived up to, the war would not now be going on.

MORE

We have continued in various ways to try and achieve a cease-fire and I can assure you that we intend to continue those efforts.

But it is tragic, in my judgment, that what everybody thought was good in January of 1973 has been violated and now we are faced with a terrible catastrophe at the present time.

QUESTION: But would we not then a year from now, or five years from now, still have the same moral obligation you speak of?

THE PRESIDENT: It is my best judgment, based on experts within the Administration, both economic and military, that if we had made available for the next three years reasonable sums of military aid and economic assistance that South Vietnam would have been viable, that it could have met any of its economic problems, could have met any military challenges.

This is another of the tragedies. For just a relatively small additional commitment in economic and military aid, relatively small compared to the \$150 billion that we spent, that at the last minute of the last quarter we don't make that special effort and now we are faced with this human tragedy. It just makes me sick every day I hear about it, read about it and see it.

QUESTION: Mr. President, a political question: You have some interest, I believe, in 1976, and there is some doubt about the wisdom of some of the primary laws that have been enacted.

I wonder, do you place your confidence in the primary laws or do you like the convention system better?

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Kirkpatrick, I have always enjoyed a good election contest. I certainly would not lift my hand to try and get any State to do away with a Presidential primary election law.

I think a good contest is helpful for the public, for the candidate, and I would not, under any circumstances, try to undermine the decision of any State to continue its Presidential primary legislation.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. President.

END

(AT 2:05 P.M. EDT)