

PRESS CONFERENCE NO. 15

of the

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

7:30 P.M. EDT
June 9, 1975
Monday

In the Rose Garden
At the White House
Washington, D.C.

THE PRESIDENT: Good evening and won't you all sit down, please.

On Friday the "Commission on CIA Activities within the United States" presented its report to me. I read the report this past weekend, and I have decided it should be made available to the public. It will be released tomorrow.

I thank the Vice President and the other members of the Commission and the staff. It will be obvious to those who read the report that the Commission has done an extensive job of looking into the allegations that the CIA exceeded its authority by conducting domestic operations in violation of its statute. My reading of the report leads me to the conclusion that the Panel has been fair, frank and balanced.

I will ask the Attorney General to study all the materials gathered by the Commission on any matter to determine whether action should be undertaken against any individuals.

I am asking each of the Federal Agencies and Departments affected by the report to study its recommendations and report back to me with their comments.

In addition to investigating the original allegations of improper domestic activities by the CIA, the Commission, at my request, subsequently looked into allegations concerning possible domestic involvement in political assassination attempts. The Commission has reported that it did not complete every aspect of that investigation. The materials they have developed concerning these allegations have been turned over to me in classified form.

Because the investigation of political assassination allegations is incomplete and because the allegations involve extremely sensitive matters, I have decided that it is not in the national interest to make public materials relating to these allegations at this time. However, under procedures that will serve the national interest, I will make available to the Senate and House Select Committees these materials together with other related materials in the Executive Branch.

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(OVER)

I know that the members of the Congress involved will exercise utmost prudence in the handling of such information.

As I have stated previously, I am totally opposed to political assassinations. This Administration has not and will not use such means as instruments of national policy. However, in fairness, none of us should jump to the conclusions as to events that may have occurred in the past 15 or 20 years.

After I have further studied the recommendations of the Commission, I will order or submit to the Congress the necessary measures to insure that the Intelligence Community functions in a way designed to protect the Constitutional rights of all Americans.

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It remains my deep personal conviction that the CIA and other units of the Intelligence Community are vital to the survival of this country. As we take the steps necessary to insure the proper functioning of the Intelligence Community, we must also be certain that the United States maintains the intelligence capability absolutely necessary for the full protection of our national interests.

QUESTION: Mr. President, will you turn over to the Justice Department the materials on the allegations of assassination plots as well as the other materials? And if so, will you expect them to conduct their own investigation then in that field to determine whether criminal prosecution might be in order?

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Cormier, I will turn over the material that has been given to me by the Rockefeller Commission and I will turn over to the Justice Department other material within the Executive Branch of the Federal Government so that the Department of Justice and the Attorney General will have full access to whatever we have for a determination by them as to any need to prosecute any individual.

Miss Thomas?

QUESTION: Mr. President, at a recent news conference you said you had learned the lessons of Vietnam. Since then, I have received a letter from Mrs. Catherine Litchfield of Dedham, Massachusetts. She lost a son in Vietnam and on her behalf and on behalf of many, many parents with her plight, I would like to ask you what are those lessons you learned from the Vietnam experience?

THE PRESIDENT: I think, Miss Thomas, there are a number of lessons that we can learn from Vietnam. One, that we have to work with other governments that feel as we do -- that freedom is vitally important. We cannot, however, fight their battles for them. Those countries who believe in freedom as we do must carry the burden. We can help them, not with U.S. military personnel but with arms and economic aid so that they can protect their own national interest and protect the freedom of their citizens.

I think we also may have learned some lessons concerning how we would conduct a military operation. There was, of course, from the period of 1961 or 1962, through the end of our military involvement in Vietnam, a great deal of controversy whether the military operations in Vietnam were carried out in the proper way. Some dispute between civilian and military leaders as to the proper prosecution of a military engagement -- I think we can learn something from those differences and if we ever become engaged in any military operation in the future -- and I hope we don't -- I trust we have learned something about how we should handle such an operation.

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Q Does that mean you would not conduct a limited war again with a certain amount of restraint on the part of our bombers and so forth?

THE PRESIDENT: I would not want to pass judgment at this time on any hypothetical situation. I am simply indicating that from that unfortunate experience in Vietnam, we ought to be able to be in a better position to judge how we should conduct ourselves in the future.

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QUESTION: What is the nature of the Federal law that may have been violated by the CIA? I can understand where a state law may have been violated, but is there a Federal statute you have in mind?

THE PRESIDENT: Involving the CIA?

QUESTION: Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: In 1947, the Congress passed the basic charter of the Central Intelligence Agency, and the law passed by the Congress gives certain responsibilities to the CIA in the handling of intelligence overseas. It was understood, as I have read excerpts from the debate of 1947, that the Central Intelligence Agency should not be involved in any domestic activities.

Now, if individuals within the CIA violated that basic charter, it will be for the Attorney General to make a judgment as to whether there should be any prosecution. In a broader sense, however, if it is determined that the Central Intelligence Agency, as an organization, has violated its charter, then, of course, corrective action will have to be taken, and without revealing what was in the report from the Rockefeller Commission, I believe there will be certain recommendations for some legislation and some administrative action that ought to be taken to make certain and positive that the agency does its job and that the rights of Americans, domestically, are well protected.

Yes, Mr. Brokaw -- er, Mr. Jarriel.

QUESTION: I was wondering why you had the Rockefeller Commission stop short in its work and not complete its investigation into alleged political assassinations? Why did you not reach a conclusion in that particular area?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me say, at the outset, I did not tell the Rockefeller Commission that it should not proceed further. The Rockefeller Commission, on its own, decided that it wanted to conclude its operations on the basis of the original responsibilities given to it.

The Commission, at the outset, was told it should investigate allegations concerning domestic violations of its charter. Subsequent to that, there were questions -- I should say -- raised about political assassinations. I suggested that the Commission undertake an investigation of any domestic involvement in political assassinations.

The Commission, after the original 90 days it was given to complete its report, requested an extension for an additional time, and I gave them an additional 60 days.

Sometime in early May, the Commission decided that it wanted to conclude its original assignment, and they decided that they should make the report, which will be released tomorrow to the public. And they have turned over to me the material they collected concerning any political assassinations.

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QUESTION: This was a Presidential commission, of course. Do you agree with their conclusion to stop without reaching a conclusion in this particular area?

THE PRESIDENT. I do for this reason, that the material they have collected, the interviews, the hearings, any other material that they are giving to me I am turning over to the Attorney General along with other material that we are collecting within the Executive Branch of the Government so that the proper agency of the Executive Branch of the Federal Government will be in a position to analyze and to prosecute if there is any need to do so.

QUESTION: Sir, if I may press you on that just a little bit. Why aren't they the proper agency to do that? They were assigned by you to look into the CIA and find out what was wrong. They obviously got into something very controversial and then all of a sudden they just stopped. Why didn't you tell them, "Go on, fellows, and get to the bottom of this." Isn't that the way investigations are usually conducted?

THE PRESIDENT: I think you have to bear in mind the original assignment of the Rockefeller Commission which was to investigate any alleged illegal activities domestically. The CIA has a charter only to conduct intelligence matters overseas and the allegation was made by many that the CIA had involved itself into domestic intelligence matters.

I asked the Rockefeller Commission to undertake an investigation of the original charges which was a very major responsibility. I think they decided that they should conclude their investigation of the basic charges and give to me for proper utilization by the Attorney General for any further investigation and prosecution.

I think it is a responsible manner in which to handle this situation.

QUESTION: But you don't think you are going to open yourself up to some kind of charge of coverup by doing it this way?

THE PRESIDENT: I am convinced that with the Attorney General, Mr. Ed Levi, we have a man who is going to carry out his sworn obligation to conduct an investigation on the broadest basis and to prosecute if there is any problem. I have full faith in the Attorney General and I should add that the Senate and House Committees are also in the process of making further investigations as they have been charged with the responsibility by the Congress so there is not going to be any possibility of any coverup because we are giving them the material that the Rockefeller Commission developed in their hearings, plus any other material that is available in the Executive Branch.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, do you foresee any time in the future when that material from the Rockefeller Commission that relates to assassination plots and other White House material that you say you will now turn over to Congressional committees, do you foresee any time when it might be in the public interest to have that released?

THE PRESIDENT: I think there may be and if you noticed in my opening statement I said at this time that I would not want to prejudge that at the moment.

QUESTION: Mr. President, what part was played in your thinking by concern about the memories of President Eisenhower and President Kennedy and the fear that not fully substantiated allegations coming out, especially by the late President Kennedy, at this time, would lay you open to the charge of trying to interfere with a candidacy of Senator Kennedy?

THE PRESIDENT: I was personally very cognizant of anything that I divulged, passing judgment in hindsight as to decisions made in the last 15 or 20 years. I have read the summary from the Rockefeller Commission concerning political assassinations. I have read other material collected by the Executive Branch of the Government, going back to late 1959 and running up through 1967 or 1968. I have read that myself, and under no circumstances do I want to sit in 1975 passing judgment on decisions made by honorable people, under unusual circumstances. I think historians will make those judgments better than anybody in 1975, including myself. So it is my feeling that I, the members of Congress and others, ought to reserve judgment and that is why I caution the House and Senate Committees to use utmost prudence in how they handle the material I am giving them.

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QUESTION: When you say, sir, that you don't want to sit in judgment on decisions made by others some 15 years ago, are you suggesting that there were decisions made by the Presidents in that time?

THE PRESIDENT: No, quite the contrary. I am not passing judgments on whether they were right or wrong. I simply am saying that for us 15 to 20 years later to put ourselves in the position of people who had the responsibility in the highest echelons of our Government, we shouldn't be Monday morning quarterbacks, if I could invent a cliché. I think it is better to let history tell the story rather than contemporaries.

Yes?

QUESTION: Mr. President, in the view of what some people have called the post-Watergate morality, do you believe the CIA's credibility can be restored until and unless the story of the allegations of political assassination are disclosed fully to the public?

THE PRESIDENT: Of course, I do. I believe that the credibility of the CIA can be and will be restored by the report of the Rockefeller Commission, and the recommendations of the several Congressional committees.

I believe that there can be internal improvement in the CIA. I think there can be legislative recommendations that I hope the Congress will enact, and the net result will be that we will have a strong, effective and proper Central Intelligence Agency.

I have complete faith that we can do the job, that we will do it and that we will have a CIA that will do the job for us.

Yes?

QUESTION: I wonder if I can change the subject to Europe and the future. There are reports in Europe, sir, that both the United States and the Soviet Union seem to be less and less interested in the Security Conference that is due up this year. Could you tell me something about the future timetable, when that might come up, how SALT is doing, when you might be seeing Mr. Brezhnev, and so forth? There seems to be some slippage in this.

THE PRESIDENT: While I was in Europe, I discussed with many European leaders the status of the European Security Conference, their views. It appears that there are some compromises being made on both sides between the Warsaw Pact nations and European nations, including ourselves, that will potentially bring the European Security Conference to a conclusion. Those final compromises have not been made, but it is getting closer and closer.

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I hope that there will be sufficient understanding on both sides to bring about an ending to this long, long negotiation. If it does, in the near future, we probably would have a summit in Helsinki.

The negotiations on SALT II are progressing, I think, constructively. The technicians are working on problems of verification and other matters that are very important, but can be better outlined and put together by the technicians.

I am optimistic that we can have a SALT II agreement, but I can assure you, as I have others, that we are going to make certain that our national security interest is very, very adequately protected, and I think it can be, as I look at the overall picture.

QUESTION: To follow up, sir, when do you think Mr. Brezhnev might be coming here? Would you give a ballpark-guess on that?

THE PRESIDENT: I would hope if negotiations go the way they are, some time in the fall of 1975.

Yes?

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QUESTION: Mr. President, turning to the economy, the unemployment figures for the month of May were at a 34-year high; 9.2 percent. What is your assessment of where the economy will stand at the end of this year, and pick some random date in the future -- let's say, October or November of the election year -- as to where it will stand then?

THE PRESIDENT: I am optimistic that the economy has bottomed out. We have had a lot more good news than we have had bad news. The bad news, of course, was the increase in the unemployment to 9.2 percent, but I hastily add that, for the second month in a row, we have had an increase in actual employment.

As a matter of fact, over the last two months, we have had about a 450,000 increase in people employed in the domestic economy. In addition, we are continuing our headway in the battle against inflation. We have cut the rate of inflation by about 50 percent in the last six months.

The civilian economy showed some other encouraging factors. The Department of Commerce, last week, released a report that showed that the 12 economic indicators were up 4.2 percent, one of the largest, if not the largest, increase in the last several years. New orders, housing permits are up.

We have gotten, I think, an accumulation of encouraging signs, and I believe that towards the end of the year it will look better. And I happen to believe, in 1976, the economy will look even better, and we are going to work at it.

QUESTION: Would you care to give out a figure, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: No.

QUESTION: Mr. President, to follow on Helen's question, sir, do you believe the language of our mutual defense treaty with South Korea requires the presence of American troops there, or can the United States fulfill its commitment short of that?

THE PRESIDENT: I believe it is highly desirable, under our mutual defense treaty with South Korea, to maintain a U. S. military contingent in South Korea. We have now roughly 38,000 U. S. military personnel in South Korea. I think it is keeping the peace in Korea, and I think it is important for the maintenance of peace in the Korean peninsula that, that force stay in South Korea.

QUESTION: Are you thinking of keeping them there indefinitely, or do you hope to review that question next year?

THE PRESIDENT: It is constantly under review.

QUESTION: Mr. President, to get back to the CIA, some senior assistants of yours have blamed Vice President Rockefeller for having suggested the public report on the CIA would contain assassination findings and for announcing plans to issue the Commission report before checking with you. Has this caused you any embarrassment, or anyone in the White House?

THE PRESIDENT: It has not embarrassed me. I have, of course, been in constant contact with the Vice President. I understand that the Commission was going to make the decision that it would not get any further into the political assassination area, that they wanted to conclude their Commission investigation and file its report.

The Vice President and I understand each other perfectly.

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QUESTION: The Prime Minister of Israel is coming on Wednesday, I believe, and you met with Egyptian President Sadat a week ago. As you go into this next phase of consultations, are you any more prepared to give Israel stronger guarantees?

THE PRESIDENT. My meeting with Prime Minister Rabin of Israel, which is to be held on Wednesday and Thursday of this week, will be a meeting where I will get his personal assessment of the overall situation in the Middle East.

We will discuss the options that I see as possible, either a resumption of the suspended step by step negotiations or a comprehensive recommendation that I would make to probably reconvene the Geneva Conference or a step by step process under the umbrella of the Geneva Conference.

I am going to go into these alternatives or these options in depth with Prime Minister Rabin and when we have concluded our discussions, I will be in a better position to know how our Government should proceed in trying to achieve a broader peace, a more permanent peace, with fairness and equity in the Middle East.

Mr. DeFrank.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President.

You keep saying that you are going to announce your candidacy for election in 1976 at the appropriate time, but nothing happens. Are we getting any closer to that appropriate time and, if so, can you tell us about that?

THE PRESIDENT. You are getting closer and closer, (laughter) but I have not picked a specific time for that announcement. There is no doubt of my intention. I reiterate it again tonight, but all I can say is we are getting closer and closer to a specific announcement. (Laughter)

Mr. Barnes.

QUESTION: Mr. President, when you were in Salzburg, you appeared to be especially friendly with Egyptian President Sadat. Was this public display of friendliness with him designed in any way to pressure Israel to make new concessions toward a Middle East settlement?

THE PRESIDENT: I did enjoy my opportunity to get acquainted with President Sadat and I not only enjoyed his company, but I benefited from his analysis of the Middle East and related matters, but I have the same relationship with Prime Minister Rabin. I have known him longer and this will be the second or third opportunity that I have had a chance to meet with him, plus my opportunities when he was the Israeli Ambassador here.

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I think I can be benefited immeasurably by meeting face to face with people like Prime Minister Rabin and President Sadat. This judgment by our Government in this area is a major decision and we have to get the broadest possible information to make the best judgment. And in both instances, as well as others, I am glad to have the help and assistance of those who come from that area of the world.

QUESTION: Mr. President, some of your critics in Congress argue that your veto of legislation, such as the public service jobs bill, amounts to a minority rule. Is it your judgment that the next year, year and a half, will be a series of veto confrontations and stalemate?

THE PRESIDENT: There is no need for it, if the Congress acts responsibly in the handling of the Federal fiscal affairs. I would hope that the veto that was sustained last week will put the proper environment on Capitol Hill for a responsible fiscal policy by the Congress.

If the Congress ignores the desire on the part of the President and more than a third of the House to be responsible fiscally, then, of course, we will have more vetoes.

I would hope that there might be a lesson learned and that we will have responsibility rather than irresponsibility by the Congress.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. President.

END

AT 8:01 P.M. EDT