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(Helsinki, Finland)

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THE WHITE HOUSE

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

WITH

THE PRESIDENT

AND

HENRY A. KISSINGER

SECRETARY OF STATE

AND

THE AIR FORCE ONE POOL

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE

2:31 P.M. (Helsinki Time)

QUESTION: Mr. President, can you tell us where you made progress on SALT, and do you think that we will have a SALT agreement by the end of the year?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think I should get into the details of where we made progress, but the two sessions with Mr. Brezhnev and myself resulted in progress. We have referred to the technicians in Geneva our areas of agreement, and they are going to work out the details.

I am encouraged -- it was constructive and friendly -- and our plans are no different today for any subsequent meetings than they were before.

QUESTION: Mr. President, progress is a bit of a vague term. Can you characterize it as significant progress, minor progress, and specifically do you still hope for an agreement to be signed by the end of this year?

THE PRESIDENT: I would say the progress was encouraging, and that is also a word that could be qualified, but it was encouraging.

It is very difficult, these negotiations, where it requires mutual give and take, so if we want the end result, which is peace, a reduction of the arms burden, it requires some understanding on the part of the Soviet Union and its people, myself and our people. So, when I say encouraging, I think we are edging toward that mutual objective.

QUESTION: By the end of the year?

THE PRESIDENT: Hopefully.

QUESTION: Sir, you say you are sending the technicians to Geneva to complete the areas of agreement. What about the areas in which you have not yet reached agreement? What do you do with them?

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THE PRESIDENT: It is anticipated that Secretary Kissinger and Foreign Minister Gromyko will have at least two meetings where the areas of disagreement can be more clearly refined so that Mr. Brezhnev and myself, when we sit down at a final meeting, in case there has to be a resolution of the hard and final decisions, they will be clear cut and understandable.

QUESTION: We have been told in the past of three basic areas of disagreement. One was verification, one was cruise missiles and one was the BACKFIRE bomber. Can you give us a rundown on where now you're making progress and where you still don't have disagreement?

THE PRESIDENT: Those are very important areas, but I think it would be unwise for me to try to identify the particular areas of dispute in those instances. They are very precarious and are crucial points, and this is where Mr. Gromyko and Dr. Kissinger will try to more fully identify the differing positions and give us an opportunity, Mr. Brezhnev and myself, to achieve some kind of an honorable settlement.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you mentioned the give and take of negotiations. At Helsinki, did the Russians demonstrate a willingness to give as much as to take?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I think they, by past performance and the discussions of several days ago, as well as today, indicated a forthcoming attitude. They, of course, have the same problem I have. They have to convince their people, as I have to convince the American people, that there is an area which is secure for all of us. So, I would indicate that their attitude was forthcoming within their limits and responsibilities.

QUESTION: Mr. President, are you satisfied that if the bases in Turkey remain closed down that you could still police the SALT I agreement? Are you talking about a new agreement, one that is going to make it much more difficult to police?

THE PRESIDENT: The closing of the bases in Turkey by the Congressional action makes it more difficult for us to adequately gather the necessary intelligence, which involves our security. There are, to some extent, alternative bases, but they would cost a great deal of money and they would involve some other negotiations between other parties.

I just don't think the Congress understands the problem. They want to close the bases, they want it to cost more money, they want to handicap our capability, and it makes no sense at all.

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QUESTION: Well, you are going to propose building some new bases? Is that what they have to do, give these bases?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I am going to continue my determined fight to remove the arms embargo, solve the Cyprus question, get our intelligence bases in Turkey reopened in full operation so that our security in the future is as good as it was in the past.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you find the Russians are prepared to talk now about negotiating reductions of arms in Europe, conventional arms, as well as nuclear; in other words, the negotiations known as Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction?

THE PRESIDENT: I have read and listened to Mr. Brezhnev's speech. I was impressed with speeches that were made by many others during the CSCE meetings. I am convinced that we can, how that the European Security Conference is over, that we can make more meaningful progress in MBFR.

QUESTION: Did you discuss that in your conversations with him the second time?

THE PRESIDENT: We discussed it in a very limited way because we concentrated on our SALT negotiations.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you said earlier that you have to convince your people, as the Russians have to convince their people, of the wisdom of the SALT talks. Do you think that the American people need much convincing about SALT?

THE PRESIDENT: I am convinced the American people want their President, their Government, to make responsible and safe agreements. On the other hand, I do not believe the American people want their President to give more than he gets.

So, that is the basic problem in our negotiating process. I can assure you that we will not give more than we get, but I still feel that in the process of negotiations, compromise, we can end up with what is good for both peoples.

QUESTION: Do the Soviets raise specific objections to some of the criticisms by Senator Jackson of the SALT agreements and the SALT negotiations when you are having these talks with them?

THE PRESIDENT: We never discuss personalities, we discuss the issues. We discuss the facts. We discuss our security, the objective of peace, and obviously they discuss their security. We don't get into personalities on the American scene, or otherwise.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, what about oil? What is going to happen now on the oil decontrol in view of Congressional rejection of your compromise proposals?

THE PRESIDENT: I am terribly disappointed that after I have made two constructive compromise efforts to phase decontrol over first a 30-month period, then a 39-month period, that the Congress would reject these proposals.

I am very grateful for what the Senate did. I am terribly disappointed in the attitude of the House because the House action does nothing to stimulate production on the one hand, and it does literally nothing to emphasize conservation on the other.

The House action, at least by a majority it does not have -- there is no other reason, or political ramification -- it does not have any substantive answer for the need for more American production and less reliance on foreign sources.

QUESTION: What is going to happen now?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the American people are far ahead of the majority of the Congress. They understand the problem and they will understand if and when I veto the extension.

QUESTION: "If" you would? Ron has always said that you would.

THE PRESIDENT: There is 99 and nine-tenths percent chance answer that I am going to veto it, but I do want to wait until I get back, and I think the American people are a lot smarter than the majority of the Congress in this case.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you have had a series of setbacks in Congress while you have been on the road -- your veto was defeated on the health matter, the military appropriations bill, one of them was defeated today, and the Turkish aid matter was not expedited.

That leads me to the question, had you been in Washington, do you think you could have twisted some arms and pulled some votes?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think so. The one veto that they overrode, I fully anticipated that they would. I wanted to make the point that I was holding the line at \$60 billion deficit, and by the majority or the two-thirds vote of the Congress they have breeched the \$60 billion deficit figure. I think the American people will support my position.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, while we are on the question of Congressmen, I understand the Silbert nomination is being returned to the White House by the Senate. Will you study that or resubmit, or what plan do you have for it?

THE PRESIDENT: Frankly, I had not heard of that action. I reiterated the nomination of Mr. Silbert, and as far as I know, there is no reason why I should change.

QUESTION: Mr. President, at the conclusion of today's talks, you wished Secretary General Brezhnev good health. You negotiated with him over a period of five hours or more. How do you think his health is?

THE PRESIDENT: I thought he looked very well this morning. In fact, I said it sincerely because I did feel that he looked better -- active and strong.

QUESTION: Better than he did the last time that you saw him?

THE PRESIDENT: I hate to compare, but I can only say that I thought he looked well and he acted strong, and it was a very good face-to-face negotiation.

QUESTION: Based on what happened today, do you expect the General Secretary will be in Washington this fall, as you intended all along?

THE PRESIDENT: There is no change in our overall plan in this regard. We have not talked about details. The plan still is in effect.

QUESTION: Is there anything new on the Middle East in terms of the possibility of an agreement between Israel and Egypt?

THE PRESIDENT: I am very cautious, very cautious, more optimistic today than I was a few days ago, but I don't want to go any further than that.

QUESTION: Would you say why you are more optimistic?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I would not want to go into any specifics.

Henry, would you like to add anything on that?

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SECRETARY KISSINGER: We will have to wait. We will see Ambassador Eilts, who is meeting us in Belgrade, and we will then get a full report of the Egyptian reaction.

The mere fact that the dialogue is going on and is not being broken off gives us some hope that we can move it forward, but we have not yet had a formal Egyptian reply, which we will get tomorrow night, and then Eilts is coming back to Washington with us to wait for the Israeli reply to whatever it is that the Egyptians have. But we have not seen yet what the Egyptians have.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in Washington a former Agriculture Department official testified that another big grain sale to the Soviet Union is going to drive up food prices by 10 percent next year.

I was wondering if that was a topic in your discussion with Mr. Brezhnev in Helsinki and exactly where the sale of U.S. grain to the Soviet Union now may stand?

THE PRESIDENT: I noticed that Mr. Schnittker had testified. I believe the sale of roughly ten million tons of American agricultural commodities have been made, and I think this is good for the farmer.

I don't believe there will be any increase in food prices as a result. I think it is good from our point of view in the balance of trade. I think it is a tribute to the great productivity of the American farmer.

In the future, we have to be very alert to the weather conditions that happen in the next month. Every indication is we will have a bountiful harvest in America. If that happens, we are in a very good position: One, to make additional sales; number two, to protect the consumer; number three, to help our balance of payments.

But for the next month, I think we have to be very alert, and I will personally keep my finger on the situation. I will welcome recommendations of other people in my Administration. This is a matter that involves the farmer, the consumer, our foreign relations, and it is a matter that the President himself must watch very carefully.

QUESTION: How did Jack and Mrs. Ford enjoy the trip?

THE PRESIDENT: Jack thinks the Finnish people are fantastic. I gave Mrs. Ford \$100 to spend, and she gave me back three Finnish coins.

Did you do any better?

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QUESTION: Oh, yes, I spent with no trouble at all.

THE PRESIDENT: So, I would say they both had a very good time.

QUESTION: Sir, there is some feeling in Europe that the United States was not going along with any eagerness in this effort to get some sort of monetary or economic talks going. Were the Europeans trying to drag us into some sort of arrangement which, in order to help their economic recovery, might affect the way in which the United States is recovering?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not going to discuss whether there will or won't be an economic conference. There was agreement that the recovery of Europe and the recovery of the United States were very closely intertwined. I was very happy to point out that our recovery was coming more quickly than theirs.

They were most interested in how we had achieved this. They wanted us -- and I agreed -- to recognize that there was this interrelationship, this interdependence, and in the months ahead, we will keep a very close liaison because economic recovery for the free world -- this includes more than the four countries -- is vitally important to the political stability of the free world.

QUESTION: What was your personal reaction to Mr. Brezhnev's speech, especially the controversial part where he talked about no country has a right to tell another country how to manage its internal affairs?

THE PRESIDENT: Overall, I thought Mr. Brezhnev's speech was very moderate. I did notice that part of the speech. I thought, as he said that, that I as President or any other President would not want some other country telling us how to manage our domestic affairs.

I think each country has a certain sanctity of internal operations -- we do, other countries do. I understand it. They can try to be suggestive, maybe persuasive, but I don't think we can assume the stature of telling another country what they should or should not do internally. I don't think they would want us to do it.

QUESTION: Did you notice the section of President Ceausescu's speech in which he complained about Radio Free Europe, and do you have any reaction to it?

THE PRESIDENT: I listened very carefully to that part of the speech. He didn't complain, as I recollect, about Radio Free Europe.

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QUESTION: He didn't name it.

THE PRESIDENT: But he said, and I noted it very carefully, other countries' radio activities are involved in other countries. We do have Radio Free Europe; we do have the Voice of America. But I understand that other countries, including neighboring Communist countries, also have radio signals that go into Romania, so I am not sure he was talking only about us.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you think the world is better today because you signed, or all these nations signed, this document?

THE PRESIDENT: Helen, I am absolutely confident, I am totally convinced that because of 35 nations participating in the Conference on European Security and Cooperation, Europe and the world are all better off.

I will know better two years from now whether our promises have been kept, but I detect very strongly a feeling and an attitude on the part of the leaders of these countries that the promises they made will be maintained.

QUESTION: When you talked to the Embassy this morning, you talked about making sure that these promises were fulfilled. How do we go about enforcing CSCE?

THE PRESIDENT: Persuasion, example. I believe that some of the unfortunate things that have happened in the last 20 years in Europe will not happen again because of the signing of the CSCE and the speeches that were made there. Those kinds of unfortunate events can be avoided in the future. CSCE was a great plus.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you feel at all defensive in a forum like this because of the problems of the Western Alliance which are highly visible -- Portugal's problems, the economic situation, the Greek-Turkish problem, all of which affect the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in one way or another -- do you feel you are operating at a disadvantage as leader of the free world in that respect?

THE PRESIDENT: I recognize we have problems, but look back at the problems of another era. Are they any worse than the economic problems in the 1950s? Are they any worse than the conflicts among Eastern European countries in the 1950s and 1960s? Are the problems today any more serious than the problems of the past?

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I don't think so. They are different, but they are not worse, and when you now have the Conference on European Security and Cooperation there is a bulwark. I think it gives us strength to meet those problems.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you think that with American price controls running out on oil September 1, should you go ahead and veto the plan, that it will have any effect on the OPEC's oil pricing plans for this fall?

THE PRESIDENT: My judgment is no. I have been assured by my economic advisers that the decontrol that Congress is forcing on me because they won't accept a reasonable compromise -- not one but two -- that there will be no serious economic price rise consequences.

QUESTION: Are you talking about petroleum in America, or are you talking about worldwide oil prices?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we really don't know what OPEC is going to do. They have got a great oversupply. They had a tremendous increase in price. We hope that through the IEA and the joint consumer-producer negotiations that there can be a responsible action both as to the producers, as well as the consumers.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. President.

END (AT 2:58 P.M. HELSINKI TIME)