Digitized from Box 19 of the White House Press Releases at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE
UNTIL 6:00 P.M. EST

JANUARY 3, 1976

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

INTERVIEW WITH THE PRESIDENT
BY
JOHN CHANCELLOR
AND
TOM BROKAW
OF THE
NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMPANY

THE LIBRARY

11:36 A.M. EST

MR. BROKAW: Mr. President, do you think it is possible for you to make decisions on national security if those decisions do not reflect the popular will of the people?

THE PRESIDENT: It does make it difficult, Tom, but I think it is the responsibility of the President to fully inform the American people and convince them that what we are seeking to do in foreign policy is in our best interest and if a President carries out that responsibility, then he can and will have the support of the American people.

MR. BROKAW: Is that the situation now in Angola? Do you have to convince the American people of what you consider to be the national security of the United States?

THE PRESIDENT: I believe there is a need and necessity for that. I don't believe that enough Americans understand the great responsibilities we have as a Nation on a worldwide basis, and that includes, of course, Africa as a whole. What we really want and what we are seeking to do in Angola is to get an African solution to an African problem and through bilateral negotiations, through working with the Organization of African Unity, through relations with the Soviet Union and others, we are trying to achieve that African solution to an African problem.

MR. BROKAW: Mr. President, the Soviet Union quite clearly has signaled in a Tass article that it wants all major powers to withdraw militarily from Angola. Has Moscow privately communicated that to you as well?

THE PRESIDENT: We are working with all powers, including the Soviet Union, to try and permit the Angolan people, the three different groups there at the present time, to get a decision or solution that will reflect a majority view of the Angolan people,and we are doing it, as I indicated, with a number of major powers, including the Soviet Union, as well as the many, many African countries that are a part of the Organization of African Unity.

MORE

MR. BROKAW: But as a result of this Tass article, is it your understanding now that Russia is prepared to break off its military support and to have Cuba quit sending troops as well to Angola?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't believe we can say categorically that that is their intention. We are simply working with them because a continuation of that confrontation is destabilizing. It is, I think, inconsistent with the aims and objectives of detente and we are making some headway, but I can't say categorically that the end result is what we want it to be at the present time,

MR. BROKAW: Mr. President, in a recent speech, Secretary Kissinger said there is a grey area between foreign policy and national security which he said, "We deny ourselves at great risk to our national security." I suppose that training foreign mercenaries for use in Angola might be called part of that grey area. Are we training foreign mercenaries for use in Angola?

THE PRESIDENT: The United States is not training foreign mercenaries in Angola. We do expend some Federal funds -- or United States funds -- in trying to be helpful, but we are not training foreign mercenaries.

MR. BROKAW: Are we financing the training of foreign mercenaries?

THE PRESIDENT: We are working with other countries that feel they have an interest in giving the Angolans an opportunity to make the decision for themselves and I think this is a proper responsibility of the Federal Government.

MR. BROKAW: Mr. President, while you may disagree with the results of the Senate vote on Angola, do you agree that it probably represents the will of the American people?

THE PRESIDENT: It may at this time, but I will repeat, as I said a few moments ago, the American people, I think, if told and fully informed as to the role and responsibility of the aims and objectives of the American Government in trying to let the Angolans and Africans come to a solution, I think in time the American people will support what we have been trying to do in Angola.

MR. BROKAW: Mr. President, in the past the Congressional role in foreign policy has been largely confined to a few Chairmen and senior members, now the process has been broadened considerably. You are formerly a man of Congress. Do you think that is a healthy sign?

THE PRESIDENT: I think Congress, under the Constitution, does have a role in foreign policy, but I don't think our forefathers who drafted that Constitution ever envisioned that 535 Members of the House and Senate could execute foreign policy on a day-to-day basis. I think the drafters of the Constitution felt that a President had to have the opportunity for decisiveness, for flexibility, for continuity in the execution of foreign policy and somehow we have to measure the role and responsibility of the Congress, which is proper, with the opportunity for the President to carry out that foreign policy in the best interests of the United States.

Now, there have been some instances in recent months where I think the actions of the Congress have hampered, interfered with, the execution of foreign policy,and let me cite one or two examples. The action of the Congress about a year ago has harmed the opportunity of many to immigrate from the Soviet Union. I noticed just the other day that the immigration from the Soviet Union is down this year, including many reductions in the immigration of Soviet Jews from Russia.

I think the action of the Congress was harmful in that regard. It is my judgment that in the case of Congressional action on Turkish aid, they have slowed down the potential solution to the Cyprus problem. In some respects, and I emphasize some, the action of the Congress has hurt our efforts in the intelligence field, although the Congress in some respects in this area has illuminated what were,and I think we all recognize were, some abuses in the intelligence field.

But overall there has to be a better understanding of the role of Congress and the role of the President and they have to be meshed if we are going to be successful.

MR. CHANCELLOR: Mr. President, is it because of Vietnam and the fact that President Johnson and, to some degree, President Nixon had a lot of control over Vietnam and the Congress had very little control over it that you are in this fix?

THE PRESIDENT: I believe some of the instances that I have cited, John, are an aftermath of the trauma of Vietnam. Congress really asserted itself in the latter days of the Vietnam War. We all understand why and Congress, having whetted its appetite, to to speak, I think, in the last few months,has continued to do some things that have been harmful in the execution on a day-to-day basis of our foreign policy.

MR. BROKAW: Mr. President, as a result of the Soviet role in Angola, the fact the SALT talks have bogged down somewhat, the fact that the spirit and the letter of the Helsinki agreements have not been fully carried out by Russia, are you now less enthusiastic about the prospects of detente?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not at all, and I think it would be very unwise for a President -- me or anyone else -- to abandon detente. I think detente is in the best interest of this country. It is in the best interest of world stability, world peace.

We have to recognize there are deep ideological differences between the United States and the Soviet Union. We have to realize they are a superpower militarily and industrially, just as we are. When you have two superpowers that have such great influence, it is in the best interest of those two countries to work together to ease tensions, to avoid confrontation where possible, to improve relations on a worldwide basis.

For us to abandon this working relationship and to go back to a cold war, in my opinion, would be very unwise for we in the United States and the world as a whole.

MR. BROKAW: But won't you be under a lot of domestic political pressure in this election year to change your attitude about detente?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it would be just the reverse because when we look at detente -- with the Berlin agreements of 1971, with SALT I, which put to some extent a limitation on nuclear developments, et cetera -- and when I look at the benefits that can come from the Vladivostok agreements of 1974, it is my opinion that we must continue rather than stop.

If the American people will take a good calculated look at the benefits from detente, I think they will support it rather than oppose it, and politically I think any candidate who says abandon detente will be the loser in the long run.

MR. BROKAW: Mr. President, the historian, Will Durant, has said a statesman can't afford to be a moralist as well. Briefly, do you agree with that statement?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't believe there is any necessary conflict between the two. We have to be pragmatic. At the same time, we have to be practical as we meet these specific problems, but if you lose your moral value, then I think you have destroyed your capability to carry out things in a practical way.

MR. CHANCELLOR: Mr. President, I wonder if I could ask you a question about the United Nations, which seems to have less utility in the world these days than it did when it began, and also about some of the pressure groups we find both within the United Nations and as you see these pressure groups in foreign affairs, thinking, for example, of the influence of American Jews, of the growing influence of Arabs, of various groups.

Aren't those groups kind of closing in on you, or do you feel that sometimes, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: I believe that substantial progress was made, John, in the United Nations in the Seventh Special Session late in 1975. That was a very constructive session of the United Nations, which sought to bring together a developing, as well as the developed, nations.

This was constructive. Now, it is true that subsequent to that there were some very vitriolic debates, there were some very serious differences that developed in the United Nations from various pressure groups.

I would hope that in the future some of this conflict would subside and there would be a more constructive effort made to solve the problems and, since I am always an optimist--and I think it is important and necessary for a President to be that--I think that as we move in the United Nations in the future that we can calm some of the voices and get to some of the answers.

So, this country's foreign policy in the United Nations will be aimed in that direction, and if we follow what we did in the Seventh Special Session, and what we are trying to do now, I think these pressure groups will recognize that words are not the answer, but solutions will be to the benefit of all parties concerned.

MR. CHANCELLOR: In your history in public life, as a Member of Congress, Mr. President, and now as the President, do you find that organized groups play a greater role now in terms of our foreign affairs, or trying to influence them, than they did when you began?

THE PRESIDENT: To some degree, yes. I think highly organized, very articulate pressure groups can, on occasion, tend to distort the circumstances and can hamper rather than help in the solution.

I don't believe those pressure groups necessarily represent the American people as a whole. So, a President, myself included, has to look at the broader perspective and not necessarily in every instance respond to the pressure groups that are well-intentioned but who have a limited perspective, or scope.

And, as we move ahead, we are going to try and predicate our foreign policy on the best interests of all the people in this country, as well as our allies and our adversaries, rather than to respond to a highly articulate, a very tightly organized pressure group of any kind.

We cannot let America's policies be predicated on a limited part of our population or our society.

MR. CHANCELLOR: Mr. President, thank you for spending that extra minute with us. We thought that was an important point. I appreciate very much your answering that question.

END (AT 11:55 A.M. EST)