

Partial Transcript of Kissinger's Press Conference

Partial transcript of press conference yesterday by Henry A. Kissinger, assistant to the President for national security affairs.

Kissinger: As you remember from the many briefings that we have had on Vietnam, there has been no issue of greater concern to this administration than to end the war in Vietnam on a negotiated basis. We have done so because of what we felt the war was doing to us as a people and because we felt that it was essential that whatever differences that may have existed about how we conducted the war, that we ended it in a way that showed that we had been fair, that we had been reasonable, and that all concerned people could support.

We have not approached these negotiations in order to score debating points. We have not conducted these negotiations in order to gain any domestic benefits. In the very first meeting that we conducted with the other side, we mentioned these principles: We said, one, we want a just settlement. Secondly, we recognize you will be there after we have left and therefore, it is in our interest that we make a settlement that you will want to keep.

We have said that we will try to make a settlement that takes account of your sacrifices and of your concerns . . .

Fairness Stressed

I mention that because whatever the debates now should be—and even though

we don't argue that other proposals are not possible, we put these proposals forward with the intention to be fair, to be just—that if we do not succeed in convincing fair-minded Americans that we have made a serious effort, then no matter what debating points we score besides are irrelevant . . .

The note which we transmitted with our October 11th proposal read as follows: "At the September 13th meeting, Minister Xuan Thuy stated that the U.S. side should review the various suggestions made by the North Vietnamese, The North Vietnamese side has also said that it would be forthcoming if a generous proposal is made by the U.S. side. The U.S. believe that this new proposal . . ." which is the one we made yesterday, more or less, goes to the limits of possible generosity and fully takes into account North Vietnamese propositions. The United States hopes that the North Vietnamese response will reflect the same attitude. Dr. Kissinger is prepared to meet on November 1st with Mr. Le Duc Tho or some other Hanoi together with Minister Xuan Thuy. He will be prepared at that meeting also to take into account other points that have been discussed in previous meetings in this channel."

In other words, we were not offering it on a take it or leave it basis.

"In the interim, it is expected that both sides will refrain from bringing pressure from public statements which can only serve to

complicate the situation."

This was to avoid having a public and secret proposal "The U.S. side is putting forth these proposals as one last attempt to negotiate a just settlement before the end of 1971."

In other words, this was not a bellicose take it or leave it statement.

"Then when on November 17th we were told that Mr. Le Duc Tho was ill, on November 19th, we transmitted the following message: "On October 11, 1971, the U.S. side made a comprehensive proposal designed to bring a rapid end to the war on a basis just for all parties. The United States proposal took fully into account the propositions of the North Vietnamese side, including all the concerns raised at the last private meeting on September 13, 1971.

"The U.S. side further indicated that it would be prepared to take account of other points that had been discussed in previous meetings in this channel. The U.S. proposed a meeting on November 1, 1971, between Dr. Kissinger and Special Adviser Le Duc Tho or some other appropriate official from Hanoi, together with Minister Xuan Thuy.

"The North Vietnamese, in an October 25, 1971, message said that Special Adviser Le Duc Tho and Minister Xuan Thuy agreed to meet with Dr. Kissinger on November 20, 1971. The U.S. side accepted this date.

"On November 17, 1971, the North Vietnamese side informed the U.S. side that Special Adviser Le Duc Tho was now ill and unable to at-

and the November 20th meeting. The U.S. side regrets his illness. Under these circumstances, no point would be served by a meeting.

"The U.S. side stands ready to meet with Special Advisor Le Duc Tho or any

other representative of the North Vietnamese political leadership, together with Minister Xuan Thuy, in order to bring a rapid end to the war on a basis just to all parties. It will wait to hear recommendations from the North Vietnamese side as to a suitable date."

I mention these to indicate the tone and the spirit in which we have attempted to approach this issue . . .

You are all familiar with the proposal that the President advanced in his address yesterday. In short, it calls for a total withdrawal from South Vietnam of all U.S. and other foreign forces allied with the Government of South Vietnam within six months after an agreement.

It proposes the release of all prisoners of war. The language is more complex, but I am just trying to summarize it.

It advances certain principles which should govern the political future of South Vietnam, which include limitations on military and economic assistance, to a policy of, in effect, nonalignment for all the countries of Southeast Asia, including, of course, South Vietnam.

Most importantly, it includes a new election for a new political leadership in South Vietnam. There are two provisions with respect to this. One is the creation immediately, upon signing of an agreement, of an Electoral Commission, including all political forces of South Vietnam, including the National Liberation Front. That commission would have sole responsibility for organizing and supervising the election so that the government in office would have no responsibility for organizing the election and no power with respect to supervising it. The commission begins operating the day the agreement is signed.

Secondly, it proposes, and President Thieu has proposed, that a month before the election, five months

after the agreement is signed, or at any rate one month before the election, if the election is held sooner, he will resign and so will the elected Vice President of South Vietnam.

Caretaker Regime

The day-to-day administration would be in the hands of a caretaker government headed by the President of the Senate. The election, however, would be run, organized, and supervised by the Electoral Commission, which will have been operating in any event for five months.

Fourthly, there is a provision for a cease-fire throughout Indochina. And then there are other provisions such as the negotiation among the countries of Indochina about various steps to guarantee their sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in each other's affairs, international supervision, and an international guarantee.

So we can narrow the issues, let me explain to you how we got to where we are. I will not discuss the six private meetings that took place in 1969 and 1970, because they are not relevant to our immediate concern, even though they, too, invariably broke down on the same issue that has characterized these. But let me talk about the six private meetings that took place in 1971, on May 31, June 26, July 12, July 26, August 16, and September 13.

I will not describe each of these meetings, because as I said yesterday, we will attempt to maintain as much of the confidentiality of this channel as is compatible with the necessity of explaining our position to our public, but I will give, in gross terms, the main issues.

On May 31, we proposed a withdrawal of American forces. We were prepared to set a deadline for the withdrawal of American forces and the exchange of prisoners. This was the first time that the United States had indicated a willingness to set a date, the first time that the United States had indicated that it was prepared to do so unilaterally; that is to say, without an equivalent assurance of withdrawal from the other side.

Things moved so fast that the breakthroughs of one

year tend to be overlooked the following year. The North Vietnamese response was not that there was this or that element of the proposal that was unacceptable. They did not say "cease-fire is difficult for us." The North Vietnamese said that any proposal that did not include political elements could not even be negotiated. So our attempt to negotiate the military issue separately was simply rejected.

The North Vietnamese, I repeat, insisted that any settlement had to include political aspects. Ladies and gentlemen, I have noticed in

some commentaries a reference to the fact that our proposal yesterday is complex; why didn't we put forward a simplified proposal?

We put forward a simplified proposal. It was negotiated. It is the other side which has insisted that the only possible proposal is one that includes the political elements. I may say that this is the one position, or one of the positions which they have never altered, on which they have never shown the slightest give, and it is, therefore, our attempt to accommodate to their position, not our attempt to complicate the situation, that accounts for the nature of our proposal yesterday.

Now, then, as we told you yesterday, at the next private meeting on June 26th, they put forward their 9-point proposal which, indeed, linked together the political and military issues.

Now, consistent with our attempt to protect the confidentiality of these negotiations to the maximum, we are not releasing their 9-point proposal, although I repeat on the record what I said to you on background yesterday; that is to say, if the other side—(Laughter).

I noticed that one of the newspapers said "A White House official who participated in the negotiations"—in (Laughter)—and since we have not revealed Ziegler's participation, it had to be me. (Laughter)

In any event, I will say that if the other side wishes to release its 9-point pro-

posal, we have no objection. As the President pointed out to you yesterday, four days later the other side published a 7-point proposal which presented us with a slight difficulty: that we had a secret proposal in the private channel and a public proposal in the public channel; that we were accused of not responding to the public proposal in the public channel; that we were accused of negotiating the private proposal.

I was asked yesterday what the difference is between the 9- and 7-point proposals I will sum it up as follows:

First, the grammar of the nine points is somewhat easier to grasp for the American mind. It is less ambiguous because it was not intended for publication, and, therefore, from a negotiating point of view, as one was negotiating it, the formulations were simply quite different, even when the substance was the same. On a number of issues the substance was the same, although the formulation was different.

Political Aspects

On the political solution, that is, on the political content of the future of South Vietnam, the seven points are much more detailed than the nine points.

On the case fire, the nine points are more detailed than the seven points; indeed, the seven points, in effect, are a truce made with American forces while we withdraw. The nine points are a cease-fire in our sense, to be concluded together with the overall settlement. So, therefore, the cease-fire is not in itself an issue in the negotiations, the principle of the case-fire.

Then there are some points covered in the nine points that are not covered in the seven points, such as international supervision, respect for the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962, and a general statement about the problems of Indochina.

I have gone into this detail because at the June 26th meeting we agreed, contrary to our May 31st proposal, that we would lump the political and military issues to-



Associated Press

Presidential adviser Henry A. Kissinger talks with newsmen during his July 12 trip

to Paris to discuss ending the Vietnam war. With him is Ambassador David K. E. Bruce.

gether; that is to say, we accepted the nine points as a basis for negotiation, and from then on, every American proposal has followed the sequence and the subject matter of the nine points.

Now, you can ask me "Why do we have eight and they have nine if we have followed the sequence and the subject matter of their points?" The answer is, one of their nine points is a demand for reparations as part of a settlement, as it is, indeed, in the seven points. We took the position that we could not, in honor, make a peace settlement in which we would be obligated under the terms of the peace settlement to pay reparations.

We did, however, tell the other side that while we would not include the reparations as part of the peace settlement, we could give and undertake, a voluntary undertaking by the Presi-

dent, that there would be a massive reconstruction program for all of Indochina in which North Vietnam could share to the extent of several billion dollars . . .

Now, then, in June and July we went through the nine points point by point. We followed the strategy of seeing whether we could get an agreement in principle, and then if we got an agreement in principle, our intention was, our mutual intention was, to pass the implementation into the public forum where the experts could deal with the matter on a more sustained basis than on these rather complicated and difficult secret trips to Paris.

After having gone through every point of the nine points, and in those categories where the seven points were more specific than the nine points—that is to say, those categories that pertain to the political future of South Vietnam and to its legal status—with re-

spect to those we answered the seven points. We then tabled an eight-point proposal, and now you understand why it was eight points on August 16th.

Date Specified

That proposal set a date for withdrawal which was nine months after signing an agreement, or to put it another way, we said "We are prepared to withdraw by August 1, 1972 provided an agreement is reached by November 1, 1971." It included specific proposals for American neutrality in the forthcoming South Vietnamese elections, and for the first time introduced a number of political principles, such as a declaration of the American willingness to limit our aid to South Vietnam if North Vietnam would agree to a limitation; and secondly, it agreed to the principle of nonalignment for South Vietnam as long as all the other countries of Indochina agreed to the principle of nonalignment.

We pointed out that the publication of such principles was, in itself, a political fact, and would, in itself, affect the political evolution, and we formally stated that we were prepared to have an economic reconstruction program along the lines of what had been orally discussed before.

This was turned down on September 13th, essentially on two grounds, that the withdrawal date was too long, and that we had been unclear about how we defined total withdrawal, that is to say, whether any forces would remain in an individual capacity, and secondly, on the ground that a simple declaration of American political neutrality while the existing government stayed in office would

not overcome the advantage of the existing government in running and being in office.

We therefore reflected about those two objections and we submitted, in early October, October 11th, the proposal which you have, essentially, before you, indicating that we were prepared to implement it in stages.

In this proposal, we met the first point by indicating that we were talking about the total withdrawal of all U.S. and allied forces. We shortened the deadline. We

gave a precise description of how the political process might operate, that is to say, we put forward the Electoral Commission and we indicated that President Thieu had agreed that he would resign prior to the election.

Global Accord

And we also indicated that we were prepared, once the global agreement was signed in principle, to begin implementing the withdrawal and prisoner exchange portions, even while the other elements were still being ironed out, provided that the final agreement would be reached within that six-month period in which the withdrawals were running.

Yesterday's proposal is essentially the proposal we made October 11th, to which we have never had a response. It added, as a new element, the public commitment of the United States and of the Government of South Vietnam, which is a crucial new element, because it is of profound significance to the political evolution of South Vietnam.

We may well differ about how we define the ceasefire, but that is not a contentious issue.

In fact, of the nine points of the other side, seven have been more or less — I don't want to say agreed to, but the differences have been narrowed to manageable proportions. There are two issues, one is the withdrawal, the other is the political evolution.

With respect to the withdrawal, there is an ambiguity about the word "date certain". The North Vietnamese position regardless of what else happens, regardless of whether there is a prisoner exchange, regardless of how they negotiate their own proposal. In other words, that we should get out unilaterally.

Moreover, they define withdrawal not just as the withdrawal of American forces, but the withdrawal of all American equipment, all economic aid, all military aid, which is, in considering the fact that they receive from \$800 million to \$1 billion worth of aid from their allies, a prescription for a unilateral term.

On the political evolution, our basic principle has been a principle we have been prepared to sign together

with them, that we are not committed to any one political structure or government in South Vietnam. Our principle has been that we want a political evolution that gives the people of South Vietnam a genuine opportunity to express their preferences.

We have searched our souls to try to come up with a proposal that seems free to us and after all, the agreement by the existing government—to have a commission comprising the people that wish to overthrow them run, organize, and supervise the election to put the election under international supervision and to resign a month before the election—is not just a trivial proposal.

The North Vietnamese position has been that they want us to agree with them,

first, on replacing the existing government and secondly, on a structure in which the probability of their taking over is closed to certainty.

They want us, in other words, to do in the political field the same thing that they are asking us to do in the military field, to negotiate the terms of the turnover to them, regardless of what the people may think.

Now, the North Vietnamese had proved to be masters in ambiguity. Throughout these months while we were negotiating the nine points and they were lacerating us for not responding to the seven points, successions of Americans came back from Paris, saying that they knew that if we would just make a proposal in the military field this would unlock the door. At the precise moment they had told us, with even greater repetitiveness than I am capable of, that there was no solution that did not include a political element; that there was no military proposal, as indeed, they have now said publicly to the New York Times and yesterday in anticipation of what they thought might be the Presidents proposal last night.

They have said that they want a government composed of people who stand for peace, neutrality, and independence. There is another magic word which eludes me at the moment. And Americans cannot ob-

ject to this proposal. The only thing is, they are the only ones who know who stands for peace, neutrality, and independence.

Whenever in these negotiations we have said, "All right, you don't like Thieu. How about this fellow, or that fellow, or that fellow?" there is almost no one that we know who they believe stands for peace, neutrality, and independence.

So I would like to express this to you. The issue is to us: We are prepared, in all conscience and in all seriousness, to negotiate with them immediately any scheme that any reasonable person can say leaves open the political future of South Vietnam to the people of South Vietnam, just as we are not prepared to withdraw without knowing anything at all of what is going to happen next. So we are not prepared to end this war by turning over the government of South Vietnam as part of a political deal.

We are prepared to have a political process in which they can have a chance of winning, which is not loaded in any direction. We have given our views of what this political process might be. We are prepared to listen to their views of what that political process might be. And we said in both notes of last fall, notes that were not intended for publication, at a time when we were hoping to be able to step before you with an agreement, that we are prepared to listen to their points.

Now, there has been some question of, "Did they ask us to replace or overthrow" —or whatever the word is— "the existing government in South Vietnam?"

Total Honesty

We have every interest in stepping before you with total honesty. They have asked two things of us:

One, an indirect overthrow of the government; that is to say, that we have to withdraw. They way they phrase it, we would have to withdraw all American equipment, even that which the South Vietnamese Army has. They have asked us to withdraw all equipment, all future military aid, all future economic aid, and the practical consequence of that proposal, while they are receiving close to \$1 billion

worth of foreign aid, would be the indirect overthrow of the Government of South Vietnam, something about which there can be no question.

But they have further asked us, and we do not want to be forced to prove it, to change the government directly, generously leaving the method to us, and, therefore, the President's statement was true and is supportable . . .

We have, in the proposals of October 11th and in the proposals we shall make tomorrow, that is to say, January 27th—the proposal the President made last night—we have outlined a detailed process by which immediately upon signature of an agreement, one of the most important aspects of sovereignty, the organizing and running of elections, would be put outside the existing government, and where the existing government would resign a month before the election, and we have told the other side that we are prepared to consider other proposals. . .

The Prognosis

Question: Dr. Kissinger, knowing the attitude now of the North Vietnamese as

you do, could you give us a prognosis of what you expect the full exposure of the secret negotiations really to accomplish, beyond what I think you have implied here, of composing some of the domestic disharmony that has been caused by the Vietnam war?

Kissinger: Of course, we would have to say that composing the domestic disharmony is a very major objective of our entire policy. If we can end the war that has divided us so much as a united people and with some dignity, then that is of very profound significance for America.

So we admit, this is one motive. The other is, we had reached a point at which our public and our private positions were diverging so much that rather than accelerating a settlement, the secret negotiations had the practical consequences of making it more difficult.

The great advantage of secret negotiations is that you can leapfrog public positions without the turmoil that any change in positions brings about internationally and domestically in some of

the countries concerned.

But here we were in a situation in which we were being pressed by sincere Americans at least to answer a proposal which we were already dealing with and in which a whole liturgy was developing on the negotiations with perfect good faith, and in which the resulting division made the other side believe that the negotiations really were a form more of psychological warfare than of negotiations.

Thirdly, it is conceivable to us, since the Vietnamese did not survive 2,000 years under foreign pressure by developing qualities of excessive trust in foreigners, it is conceivable to us that they may have considered our proposals of October 11th a negotiating ploy and therefore, by making them public and by President Thieu publicly committing himself to this evolution, we added a crucial new ingredient to the situation which we hope may unlock some of the problems.

We may be unduly influenced by our own bureaucratic experience, but it is not unknown that governments delay acting on things unless there is some impetus that requires a decision and that if something is painful or difficult, there is a tendency to push it into the future, especially in countries that don't have a NSC system as we do. (Laughter)

So, by making the proposal public, and by making clear that we will negotiate it in the spirit with which we transmitted it, that we might force a consideration in Hanoi on a somewhat more urgent basis than when they felt, well, if we don't answer it this month, we will answer it next month. . . .

Q. Dr. Kissinger, you described a process of negotiation that was taking place secretly over a period of several months and then it suddenly stopped. You have received no answer from the other side from November on. Why do you think the process stopped?

Kissinger: . . . it is a very interesting question . . . What happened between October 25th and November 17th. I don't want to speculate on that, because it is a question that also occupies

us.

Q. What have you done to try to contact them to try to get it started again?

Kissinger: As I have pointed out, after they turned it down on November 17th, we told them on November 19th that we stood ready to meet at any time, and that we were awaiting their recommendations. . . . We are still ready to resume talks in either public or private channels, or by the methods with which they are familiar. So there is no question about our readiness to negotiate.

Q. Two specific, related questions: One, is there any specific significance to the particular timing of this revelation; and two, given the deterioration of the military situation in Laos and Cambodia and the apparent impending military build-up on the other side for Tet, what prospect, if any, is there for getting them to terms?

Kissinger: We had always thought that if our negotiations with the other side, our secret negotiations, would not make some significant progress by the time Congress returned, we would owe it to the public and to the Congress to put before them the framework within which negotiations had been conducted. It was not fair to our public debate to engage in a series of battles with the Senate in which we were trying to protect a channel that was not active.

We went through last year without answering months of criticism of refusal to respond to the seven points.

We are not blaming the people who did it, because they had no other evidence to go on. But we endured months of criticism about deadlocks, about failure to respond to the seven points, about lack of imagination, because we thought that there was a chance of making progress and, therefore, this decision was made at the end of December, at a time when we actually did not think that there would be major offensive, but a series of high points.

Now, the fact that there may be an offensive impending may add another ele-

ment to it in this sense: This war has to end sometime, and sometime it must tend through negotiations. It is not we who are looking for a military victory. We have tried to end it on the basis of the principles which we put before the North Vietnamese months ago. I don't mean the formal principles, but the principles of justice, of recognition that they would be there, of recognition that while they may have reason to be suspicious, we know that if they don't have an interest in maintaining the settlement, we will have a continuation of what happened in 1954.

People say they were tricked in 1954. I don't want to enter that debate as to whether they were or not. All I want to say is if they feel that they were taken advantage of, then within a foreseeable future the war will start again. So it is in our interest to have a settlement that takes this into account.

Now the question is: Is there to be another round of warfare? We believe that we can contain the offensive, and it is even possible, maybe even probable, that the reason they make the offensive is as a prelude to a subsequent negotiation. This at least has been their pattern in 1954 and was their pattern in 1968.

So this is an attempt to say to them once again, "It is not necessary. Let's get the war over with now." But our basic decision was made at a time prior to the event.

Q: Dr. Kissinger, can you give us, sir, in your judgment, the reason why the North Vietnamese, in dealing with the United States, would insist on the United States reaching comprehensive solutions, including a political solution? Why are they unwilling to negotiate with us, in your judgment, on the military issue and take their chances in settling the political issues with the South Vietnamese?

Kissinger: The only explanation which I have, and there may be better ones, is that they apparently are not confident that if military and economic aid continues to South Vietnam that they can win their war with the South Vietnamese, because if they were, there is no rea-

son why they should not accept our proposal, as you indicated. What they are, in effect, asking from us is precisely what the President said yesterday:

They are asking us to align ourselves with them, to overthrow the people that have been counting on us in South Vietnam. They are asking us to accomplish for them what they seem not confident of being able to achieve for themselves.

That is the only explanation I can give, but I do not absolutely insist on it. It is a curious phenomenon; that is, it is they who have insisted that we deliver on the political process, rather than rely on themselves.

Q. Dr. Kissinger, doesn't your interpretation make the prospects rather bleak that they will accept the proposal?

Bleak Outlook

Kissinger: No. It makes it bleak that they will accept this proposal as long as they believe we may do it for them. If we will not do it for them, then the longer the war continues, the worse that situation gets which they are trying to avoid, and they may settle for a political process which gives them less than 100 per cent guarantee, but a fair crack at the political issue.

Q: Doctor, I believe it was said that the new proposals were being accompanied by some alternatives. Are these continuing to be discussed?

Dr. Kissinger: The new proposal was accompanied, in the speech, first by a renewed offer to discuss the military issues alone, just in case the North Vietnamese have changed their minds on this, which we think is unlikely, but we just want to make sure that this was true; and secondly, we have offered, on October 11, and we will repeat that offer tomorrow in Paris, a staged approach to the implementation of this agreement by which the withdrawal and exchanges could begin while the other details were still in the process of negotiation, as long as they were completed within the six-month period.