

News Conference by Rogers

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Following are excerpts from a news conference held today by Secretary of State William P. Rogers:

Q. The Communist negotiators in Paris this morning, in listing their price for accepting the cease-fire and really beginning the talks, said that we must end U.S. reconnaissance flights over North Vietnam—promise to withdraw by mid-1971—but they omitted their usual reference to getting rid of the Saigon Government. Do you see any significance in this omission?

A. At the moment we do not. I have just finished talking with our negotiators in Paris, and they feel that the proposals that were made by the other side are essentially the same proposals that they have made previously.

Q. For about two years we've heard a great deal about the understanding made with Hanoi in Paris. The terms we heard were that Hanoi had to accept Saigon into the talks and to refrain from shelling the cities of South Vietnam and refrain from abusing the demilitarized zone between North and South Vietnam if we were to sustain the bombing halt. At his last news conference the President said we would resume the bombing if the enemy developed and used the capacity to increase the fighting generally in the South. Now, is the President changing or expanding or abandoning the understanding?

A. In answer to the last part of your question, and without referring to the premise, let me say that what the President said at his press conference is not a new policy. He has said on every occasion in which he addressed the public that as our Vietnamization program proceeded, as American troops are being replaced by the troops of South Vietnam, that if the enemy mounted an offensive or took other action which jeopardized the lives or safety of American forces that he would take the action that he considered necessary to protect them.

Now, he said in his press conference: Lest there be any misunderstanding on the part of the North Vietnamese, let me say what I will do in the event American forces as they withdraw are put in jeopardy.

He said that he would take necessary action, including the bombing of military sites, military bases, supply lines and passes, to protect the lives of Americans who are withdrawing from South Vietnam. He said also that he hoped that wouldn't be necessary.

Now, he didn't say that was any part of the understanding. Obviously, it couldn't be part of the understanding. At the time the understanding was reached, there wasn't any Vietnamization program. Americans were not being withdrawn from South Vietnam. So it's quite a different situation.

And, what he said, very clearly—and I'm sure that the other side got the message—is that there should be no misunderstanding that we were under any restrictions or inhibitions in the process of our troop replacement—that we would take whatever steps were necessary, that he thought were necessary, to protect American lives and safety.

Now, I think also it should be said that we have a great deal of discussion in this country about the understanding; and I think it's a perfectly proper subject for discussion. But, in a sense, it's somewhat academic because the other side constantly says we never had any understanding. General Giap said it yesterday. He said the idea of the understanding is a fabrication. Well, if there's no understanding, then there are no restrictions.

Impact of the Bombing

Q. How effective was the bombing in North Vietnam from 1965 to '68, in your estimate, and what would it accomplish if it were resumed—that it did not accomplish last time?

A. I think that it's a simplification to suggest that the comments that I have just made or that the comments the President made were analogous to those that you have referred to. He was not talking about bombing as it was done before. He was talking about what to do, that he would do whatever was necessary to protect American lives, American men; and I don't think that he was saying that we are thinking about renewing regular bombings the way they were conducted before. He is saying that we are going to maintain our options to protect American men.

Q. Regardless of the public position taken by the North Vietnamese, in advance of the bombing halt in the fall of 1968 was there discussion with the North Vietnamese about reconnaissance flights? And is it the position of this Government that there was an understanding governing such flights?

A. Yes. Now, the semantics sometimes get involved because people are apt to suggest that the words "understanding" and "agreement" are synonymous. Not neces-

sarily. An understanding can be a method of operating, and neither side promises anything but it is understood this is how they will conduct themselves.

Now, I think it's quite clear that there has been an understanding and that generally it's been observed. There have been violations. In fact, there were violations over the weekend.

But generally, though, it's quite clear that there was an understanding, and it included the elements that we referred to: no violation of the DMZ, no rocketing of cities, and that our reconnaissance planes would continue to fly over North Vietnam.

Johnson Stand Recalled

Now let me read this:

"At the time of the 1968 bombing halt, the United States agreed to 'stop all air, naval and artillery bombardment and all other acts involving the use of force against North Vietnam.' The United States specifically rejected a formula proposed by the North Vietnamese calling for us to stop all 'acts of war.' This formula was rejected in order to permit the continuation of reconnaissance flights. This took place well in advance of the actual bombing halt.

"In summarizing the understanding at a meeting of his advisers on Oct. 29, 1968, President Johnson stated, 'Both Hanoi and Moscow are clear that we shall continue reconnaissance of North Vietnam. That is why we agreed to stop only acts of force and not acts of war.'

"We informed the North Vietnamese as early as Nov. 14, that, if the firing against our reconnaissance aircraft were to continue, we would have to take the necessary actions to defend our planes and protect our pilots.

"The then defense Secretary Clifford told the press on Nov. 24, 'in the Paris conversations that we have had for all these many months, it was made very clear to the representatives of North Vietnam that we would continue to maintain reconnaissance.'

"On Jan. 9, 1969, Messrs. Harriman and Vance expressed gratification to Soviet representatives Zorin and Oberemko, in Paris, that North Vietnam had not been firing on our reconnaissance aircraft. And there was no challenge to this contention on the part of Messrs. Harriman and Vance.

"So that the actions of the North Vietnamese following the bombing halt showed, we believe, that they understood what was expected of them. Violation of the DMZ and shelling of the cities decreased very substantially and the vast majority of our reconnaissance flights—and we have flown many since the bombing halt—have not been fired upon."

So I say in answer to your question: Yes, we think there was an understanding; yes, we think the evidence is convincing on that point.

Middle East Issues

Q. What kind of guarantees is the United States prepared to give Israel to bring her back to negotiating talks. And specifically, are you prepared to moderate or modify your language suggesting that only insubstantial changes must be made in Middle Eastern borders?

A. We have, I think, in our relations with Israel convinced Israel that they should have no concern about our support for their continued existence, and we have made that clear by word and by deed.

We have reason for hope that the negotiations may start. We have no assurances, but certainly we have reason for hope. We think 1971 may be a year of decision in the Middle East.

We think the climate is very good. I think the fact that we are now entering the fifth month of the cease-fire, the fact that people in the area realize how important peace is, how much it means to their lives, gives hope that they may be in a more flexible frame of mind.

We have said consistently that we think the responsibility for working out a peaceful settlement for an agreement rests among the parties, U.A.R., Jordan and Israel. We do not have any blueprint as such. We think those matters should be negotiated among the parties.

Now, having said that, the United States has indicated that it is prepared to play a role in providing guarantees: Security Council Resolution 242, that is the basis for these discussions, refers to such guarantees. We think of guarantees as not a substitute for an agreement among the parties but as supplementary and complementary. What form those guarantees would take will depend on what the parties would want and what other nations involved would want.

We are prepared to play

a role economically, to help those who have suffered from the turmoil of war in the Middle East. Including the refugees; and we're prepared to play a very active role diplomatically, and that's what we're doing.

Laird Stand Discussed

Q After the President's press conference, Secretary of Defense Laird gave a press conference in which he seemed to indicate that another part of his [Vietnam] understanding was genuine negotiations at Paris. Is the bombing halt predicted on some sort of predicated on some sort of tiations?

A No, I don't think so. I think the statement the President made in his press conference obviously reflects the policy of this Administration. Now, I read very carefully what the Secretary of Defense said in his press conference, and I didn't interpret it the way some of you did.

He read from a statement that was made by a former defense official, and in that, that statement did convey the thought that one of the conditions of the bombing halt was the continuation of good-faith negotiations in Paris, but that's not the premise on which we are operating.

The President's position is that, as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, he feels responsible to protect American lives; and as our forces withdraw from South Vietnam, if the North Vietnamese take action which he thinks is going to jeopardize the lives and safety of those men, he will take action that he thinks is appropriate.

Q. On the Middle East, when you say that the United States is prepared to play a role in peace-making or peace preservation out there, do you include the possibility of U. S. participation physically with troops in an international peace-keeping force of some kind?

A. We have not formed any conclusions on that subject. There have been some speculations that we might be willing to consider a joint Soviet-United States peace-keeping force, just involving the two nations. That concept, with just the two of us involved, would be totally impractical, and we have never given any thought to it.

Now, we have not excluded the possibility that the United States might play a peace-keeping role if it was accepted by the parties themselves, and that it was not a substitute for agreement, but it would be an added assurance that the agreement would be observed. And if it could be done under the auspices of the Security Council of the United Nations.

don't want to leave the impression that this is a policy that we have formulated. I just say we have not excluded that possibility.