White House Aide Reaffirms Criticism of The Times

NYTimes MAY 20 1972

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 19—Kenneth W. Clawson, the White House aide who accused The New York Times last night of serving "in at least two instances" as a "conduit of enemy propaganda," reaffirmed his views today and said they reflected the attitude of the White House.

In a telephone interview, he said his fundamental complaint was that two articles carried by The Times this week "should have been more thoroughly researched" and that The Times had not given the same prominence to the Government's denials as it had to the original dispatches.

One dispatch, datelined Washington, appeared on Page 1 last Sunday. It quoted "responsible informants" as saying that the mines in North Vietnamese ports were designed to deactivate themselves before President Nixon's arrival in Moscow.

North Vietnamese Cited

The second Times dispatch, from Haiphong, appeared in the paper yesterday. It cited North Vietnamese officials as saying that the American mines were being cleared from Haiphong harbor and that ships were continuing to move in and out.

It also said that "independent sources" had supported the claim and had noted that at least one ship—the East German freighter Frieden — had entered the harbor this week.

The article was followed by a Washington dispatch that quoted the Pentagon spokesman as saying that the Frieden had been in the harbor when the mines were laid.

Mr. Clawson, deputy director of communications for the White House, telephoned a statement to The Times last night complaining about both dispatches. His statement said The Times had given only a "single paragraph" to the Government's contention that the report from Haiphong was in error, and that it had failed completely to print a "correction" of the Washington dispatch.

In a statement issued in New York today, A. M. Rosenthal, managing editor of The Times, said:

"The New York Times has been asked by various news organizations to comment on a statement yesterday by Kenneth W. Clawson, deputy director of communications for the White House, on two dispatches published in The Times in reference to the mining of Haiphong Harbor.

"One dispatch from Haiphong, published May 18, quoted the North Vietnamese as saying they are clearing American mines from the Haiphong harbor as planes dropped them, and are moving ships in and out. After the second paragraph of that dispatch, the statement of Administration officials in Washington, solicited by The Times, was published categorically denying that ships had entered or left Haiphong harbor since the mining.

"Contrary to Mr. Clawson's statement that the Administration's views were summarized in this one paragraph, the Haiphong dispatch was followed by a detailed Washington story quoting the Pentagon spokesman. The Pentagon has made no complaint about the treatment of the story.

A Right Challenged

"Mr. Clawson, in charging that The Times by publishing the dispatch was acting as 'a conduit of enemy propaganda,' is challenging the right of the American public to be informed about what the North Vietnamese are saying.

"Mr. Clawson also referred to a Washington dispatch published in The Times on May 14 quoting responsible informants in Washington as saying that the mines recently sown by United States aircraft in Haiphong and six other North Vietnamese ports are designed to deactivate themselves before President Nixon's planned trip to Moscow on May 22.

"On the following day The Times published a statement by a Pentagon spokesman in which he termed the report wrong but declined to discuss the specifics of mine technology. The Times further elaborated on the views of American officials on the mining in a dispatch published in today's paper.

"The Times will continue to seek and publish pertinent, essential information from every source rather than restrict itself and its readers to official United States Government statements as Mr. Clawson seems to demand."

Official's Statement

Mr. Clawson's statement read as follows:

"In contradiction of all journalistic standards, The New York Times has been guilty in at least two specific instances of being a conduit of enemy propaganda to the American people."

"In answer to a query, The Times was told in advance by the American Government that no ship has entered or left Haiphong harbor since May 11.

"Nevertheless, The Times stooped to bad journalism when it published a long, irresponsible propaganda line indicating there is ship movement in and out of Haiphong harbor. The truth is that the Frieden has been in Haiphong harbor since April 7.

"The truth was worth a single paragraph in The New York Times today in a story of many column inches. The Times briefly noted that the United States of America said the story was false.

"The New York Times prefers its own brand of truth. For example, on Sunday, May 14, the newspaper printed a story that mines sealing off Haiphong harbor and six other North Vietnamese ports are designed to deactivate themselves before President Nixon's trip to Moscow.

"That is also incorrect information, The Times was told by the United States Government that that was false, too.

"Yet, you don't see a correction. You have yet to read a story saying 'We were misled. We were duped. We were wrong.' There has been no story admitting error.

"My question is direct and to the point. Why not?"

In the interview today, Mr. Clawson said he had not seen the article in Monday's Times quoting a Pentagon spokesman as saying that the previous day's dispatch on the self-deactivating mines had been wrong. He also said he knew now, as he had not known when he issued his statement, that The Times had printed more than a single paragraph setting forth the Government's views on the validity of the dispatch from Haiphong.

But he insisted that the Administration's side of the case had not been displayed as prominently as the original articles.

Mr. Clawson, a former reporter for The Washington Post, went on to say that what most deeply concerned him about the articles in The New York Times was that they semed to reflect a certain editorial indiference to the Government's arguments. He said he could not, either as a Government employe or as a former journalist, argue that newspapers should print only those stories verified as correct by the Government.

"That is not at all what I am saying," he said. "What I am saying is that The Times received uncontitional, flat knockdowns from the Government on both stories, and with this information in hand the editors might have at least waited a day or so before publishing the original stories. I further think that if they had waited a day, and did some more investigating on their own, the weakness of those stories would have been proved to The Times's satisfaction."

Mr. Clawson said he did not intend his settlement as a "blanket indictment" of The Times but, rather, as a statement that "in two cases, The Times blew it, and has done nothing to rectify it."