

16 JUN 71

Excerpts From Rogers News Conference

Following are excerpts from a transcript of Secretary of State William P. Rogers's news conference in Washington yesterday, as recorded by The New York Times, through the facilities of A.B.C. News:

Q. Mr. Secretary, Mr. [Clark M.] Clifford's proposal was rejected by Mr. [Ronald L.] Ziegler at the White House on the grounds that it sets too precipitous a deadline that the South Vietnamese at that stage would not be in a position to defend themselves. When will the Administration think the South Vietnamese will be in such a position and, secondly, does Mr. Ziegler's answer imply the opposition of the Administration to setting a date certain in return for the release of the prisoners is a matter of timing or principle?

A. You've asked several questions there at once. I don't think that when you refer to Mr. Clifford's proposal I think it's important to keep in mind what it is. As I understand it, it's just something that he had said publicly that he somehow has concluded. From what sources, how he comes to this conclusion hasn't been made clear to us. It seems to me that if Mr. Clifford has any information that's serious from the other side, he has the responsibility to convey that information to the Government.

Now, as far as we can tell, based on the conversations we've had with Ambassador [David K.] Bruce and with other Governments and based on other conversations that outsiders have had with the North Vietnamese, there is no validity to the comment that Mr. Clifford has made.

Timing on Principle

Q. I was wondering, first of all, since the objection of Mr. Ziegler was that the deadline of Dec. 31 was precipitous, that the South Vietnamese would not be in a position to defend themselves yet at that stage, whether this meant that the Administration was now saying that the main flaw in setting a deadline is the timing rather than the principle of the thing.

A. No, no. We have said consistently that we thought that the withdrawal of our forces from Vietnam should be done in an orderly manner. Now, the President has set a timetable. He has a schedule which he has announced. We're following that schedule. By November of this year thereabouts, maybe December, two-thirds of the troops will be out of Vietnam. He will make further announcements at that time.

Now, when we talk about combat responsibility we're talking about the major combat role in Vietnam. That is, now being handled largely by the South Vietnamese. We will continue to have some combat troops in South Vietnam for some time, to protect the remaining forces that we have there.

Q. Mr. Secretary, assuming that the American force level at some point reaches zero in Vietnam, is it the intention of the Administration to keep a military assistance or MAAG group there, and is it the intention of the Administration to supply the Saigon Government with arms, equipment and economic aid after we are out?

Willingness to Negotiate

A. We have said repeatedly and I testified before a Congressional committee that we're prepared to negotiate a settlement with the other side and in those negotiations we're prepared to consider a total withdrawal assuming that they withdraw, and assuming that we can work out the other conditions of a settlement.

Q. Mr. Secretary, I'd like to hear anything you want to say about The New York Times's publication of the documents involving America's escalation of the war. But I'd particularly be interested in your opinion as to whether this disclosure, which some people believe illustrates a certain amount of deception, is likely to have any effect on your efforts to get Hanoi into substantive peace discussions.

A. I don't believe it'll have any effect on Hanoi's attitude toward peace discussions. In connection with the general question that you posed, let me say this. This study—so-called study—was conducted during 1967 and 1968, so it was completed before this Administration took office. And it refers to our involvement—how we got involved in the war.

While we're not going to, we haven't and we're not going to get involved in the dialogue about that. That's for others to do—historians and others.

We're concerned about how to get out of the war. That's what we're doing. We hope that when the study is made of this Administration, it'll be entitled "How President Nixon Got the United States Out of the War in South Vietnam."

What is my attitude toward the publication of these papers? Let me say that these papers—and I saw

them for the first time yesterday because they were not part of our files. They were in the files of Mr. [Nicholas] deB. Katzenbach [former Under Secretary of State] and Mr. [William P.] Bundy and I'd not seen them before. But this study was a study apparently based on documents in the Defense Department. And it says in the introductory note that they did not have the White House files available, they did not question anyone. So, it's a compilation of documents with a good narrative supplied by the 36 who worked on it. And I'm not sure who they were and it obviously is a selected document. So, I think there is a word to be said in terms of fairness to withhold judgment until more is learned about this.

When the authors say they haven't questioned anybody about it and they don't have the White House files and so forth, I think we ought to reserve our judgment on it.

In any event, I'm not going to pass judgment on it. I don't think it's anything that we should be involved with.

I do think, though, that it's a very serious matter not only for the reasons that the Secretary of Defense referred to yesterday in his testimony but for many other reasons.

The Law Is Cited

First, the law clearly provides that secret documents and top secret documents should not become public until they be classified.

Secondly, from my standpoint, it's going to cause a great deal of difficulty with government outside of the United States, with foreign governments.

Already we have had demarches here in the State Department asking us about it.

And if governments can't deal with us in any degree of confidentiality, it's going to be a very serious matter.

So, I consider it a very serious matter. I notice that the Justice Department is proceeding this morning in New York in Federal Court seeking an injunction and we'll see what the courts decide.

The Right to Know

Q. Mr. Secretary, you say that you can't really make a decision about these documents until you learn more about them. What about the American people's rights to learn more about these documents. If a clamp is put on this, don't the American people have a right to object and to say that they should know what happened in 1967 and '68?

A. Well, first I didn't say what you thought I said. I said that I'm not going to become involved in making that judgment. Our job is to try and get the United States out of the war in Vietnam. The first act that the President took, the study that he ordered was a complete study of the policy of the Government and all the facts and circumstances surrounding it in order to determine what his policy should be. And based on that study we've adopted—he adopted the policy of Vietnamization which we're following. And I say that I'm not going to get involved in passing judgment on those events. We are deeply involved in how to get the United States out of this war.

Now in terms of how much the public is entitled to know, obviously they're entitled to know a good deal. But I say that I think that obviously you have laws. The laws have been carefully drafted to protect the interest of the United States.

And as I said previously, I think that it's a very serious matter when the laws are violated as they have been in this case without any reference to who violated them, but clearly they've been violated because these documents are classified, top secret and secret.

Issue of Secrecy

Q. Mr. Secretary, one of the issues on Capitol Hill is

the question of how much the Administration can do in secret, not informing the American people of certain action it takes. At one point do you believe this Administration will tell the American people how much money, for example, is being spent in Laos on the full expansion of American operations?

A. Well I think we have told the American people almost anything we could think of that we could tell without damaging the national interest and the things that we have told the American public, all the promises the President has made have been kept.

Now in terms of Laos, I can tell you now the amount of money that we spent in the 1971 fiscal year in Laos, excluding the bombing because I don't know what the cost of that is but it's in the neighborhood of \$350-million. And the Congress has known it. We've had to make that representation to Congress in order to get the money.

So there's never been any secrecy of that. Maybe that total figure hasn't been stated before. But this Administration is saddled with some of the conclusions that the public has about the past. The fact of the matter is that we're telling the public the truth and we kept our commitments and we're getting out of Vietnam and we would just hope that the American people would support the President. We are doing it as fast and in as orderly a way as we can.

Opinion Polls Cited

Q. Mr. Secretary, how can you say that we are getting out of Vietnam as fast as we can and that you're telling the American people everything that you can, how do you explain the fact, sir, that a majority of the American people in public opinion polls do not believe they are being told the whole story about the war. Nor, if I may say so, in all respect, you have not given any indication of when you're going to be out. You have never said when the last American is going to leave. It is very, very clear that you're going to keep some sort of a residual force in there. The figures show that there will be at least 7,500 Americans killed in that war up until 1975.

A. Let me answer the first part of your question. I'm sure that you're correct, that there still is a view, with a large segment of the American public that the Government somehow is not coming clean. And what you ask—why is that true? I think it's true because the war has lasted so long in the first place. So there's a feeling of frustration.

Secondly, they think they have been misled in the past. Third, some of the things that we say sound the same as the things that were said before. And they consequently say, Well, that sounds like the same old line, same, same thing. The difference is that we're doing it. The facts are different. We're withdrawing from Vietnam. At the end of the year, by December, we'll only have one-third the number of troops there that we had when we took over.

Can't Tell About Future

Now, the reason we're not telling exactly what's going to happen in the future is we, of course, we don't know exactly. We know the President has a program; he's going to follow it; we're going to do exactly what he says we're going to do. We're going to get out; we'll have a residual force there; we'll have them there as long as we need to try to get our prisoners of war released. We're going to continue an aid program, the Military Assistance Program, to provide the South Vietnamese with a reasonable opportunity to maintain their freedom.

Q. Now there is some criticism here and also abroad that NATO is now procrastinating on the MBFR [Mutual Balanced Force Reduction] now that the Soviets after

three years of thinking seem to be inclined to talk about it. What is your comment on that?

A. Well, this isn't so. As you know, NATO proposed this in 1968 and consistently held out the initiative as a possibility. Finally the Soviet Union has responded and said they're willing to talk about it. We're prepared to talk about it. Now, the NATO communiqué, I think, provides the maximum flexibility to do exactly that. I'm going to talk to Ambassador [Anatoly F.] Dobrynin in the next day or so to find out if they're prepared to have discussions on mutual balanced force reductions and find out what they're prepared to talk about, what they're thinking about in terms of time and place, etc. We're perfectly prepared to have negotiations. We want them. We're going to have a deputy foreign ministers meeting in the fall and at that time we'll coordinate with our allies and determine our positions and we are prepared to negotiate.

Turn to Middle East

Q. Mr. Secretary, I wonder if we can go to the Middle East now. There seems to be some feeling that the expectations since your return from your trip have kind of petered out following the attempted coup and the Soviet treaty. Can you analyze the treaty's implications both in larger terms and in terms of an interim settlement?

A. President Nixon said in his press conference it's a little early to form any conclusive judgment on the treaty. It depends on what happens. We would hope very much that the Soviet Union does not escalate the arms race; this would be most unfortunate.

On the other hand, we do not think that the treaty makes it impossible that an interim settlement might be reached. We are still in communication with both Israel and with Egypt. Mr. [Donald C.] Bergus [chief U.S. diplomat in Egypt] is here now and we're going to have additional discussions with him before he returns to Cairo. We think that, you know, there's a possibility that an interim settlement could be worked out. There are a number of areas of agreement. And there are some areas of disagreement. But I think it is encouraging to notice that these tricky fundamental facts are still agreed to. First, everyone would like to have the Suez Canal opened. Secondly, there's agreement that if it's opened, it will have to be operated by the Egyptians. Three, we all agree that it would only be a step toward full implementation of Security Council Resolution 242.

Peace Accord Is Goal

In other words, the objective is a final peace agreement. Fourth, that during x number of months or years the cease-fire would have to continue, because it would make no sense to have an interim agreement if the fighting should start. Five, there is agreement that if there has to be a withdrawal on the part of Israel from the canal and there would have to be an agreement that the evacuated territory would probably involve some kind of an observer force, or international force, someone to separate—in other words, to move into the evacuated territories. Now there are large areas of disagreement. What kind of evacuation to where; who would cross the canal; what kind of an observer force would be involved — and these questions are complex. But we would hope very much that based on these common factors, common in the sense that all parties want them, that something could be worked out, certainly this year.

Q. In the absence of any progress in the negotiations and under the policy of Vietnamization, how do you now envision securing the release of American prisoners of war?

A. Well, I don't have to tell you that it's an extremely difficult proposition because the North Vietnamese have decided undoubtedly that they are going to hold these prisoners to try to achieve political objectives. In effect, they're using them for ransom payments. Obviously the United States, although we have tremendous concern for the safety of the prisoners, can't lose sight of our national purpose and we can't absolutely abandon our national objectives to pay ransom.

Q. Can you cite for us some instances when P.O.W.'s have been returned before a conflict has come to an end?

A. I've been asked this question before. I think there have been some. But the principal issue at the moment in terms of P.O.W.'s is failure to live up to international law. North Vietnam has refused to have any inspection of prison camps; many of the wives and families of those who are missing are not sure that their husbands are alive or not. There's no inspection of the prison camps and so forth.

So we would hope that, in the first instance, that at least North Vietnam could live up to the international law.