

# Exerpts From Kissinger News Briefing

Following are excerpts from Secretary of State Kissinger's news briefing in Washington yesterday as recorded by The New York Times:

MR. KISSINGER: Over the past two weeks, the American personnel in Vietnam has been progressively reduced. Our objective was to reduce at a rate that was significant enough so that we would finally be able to evacuate rapidly; but this would not produce a panic which might prevent anybody from getting out.

Our objective was also to fulfill the human obligations which we felt to the tens of thousands of South Vietnamese who had worked with us for over a decade.

And finally, we sought, through various intermediaries, to bring about as humane a political evolution as we could.

By Sunday evening the personnel in our mission had been reduced to 950, and there were 8,000 South Vietnamese to be considered in a particularly high-risk category—between 5,000 and 8,000, we don't know the exact number. On Monday evening Washington time, around 5 o'clock, which was Tuesday morning in Saigon, the airport in Tan Sun Nhut was rocketed and received artillery fire.

The President called an N.S.C. meeting. He decided that if the shelling stopped by dawn, Saigon time, we would attempt to operate with fixed-wing aircraft from Tan Sun Nhut airport for one more day to remove the high-risk South Vietnamese, together with all the defense attaché's office, which was located near the Tan Sun Nhut airport.

He also ordered a substantial reduction of the remaining American personnel in South Vietnam.

## In Two Groups

I must point out—I may point out that the American personnel in Saigon was divided into two groups—one with the Defense Attaché's Office, which was located near the Tan Sun Nhut airport; the second one, which was related to the embassy and was the United States Mission in downtown Saigon.

The shelling did stop early in the morning on Tuesday Saigon time, or about 9 o'clock—9 P.M. last night Washington time.

We then attempted to land C-130's but found that the population at the airport had got out of control and had flooded the runways, and it proved impossible to land any more fixed-wing aircraft.

The President thereupon ordered that the D.A.O. personnel, together with those civilians that had been made ready to be evacuated, be moved to the D.A.O. compound, which is near Tan Sun Nhut airport, and about 11 o'clock last night he ordered the evacuation of all Americans from Tan Sun Nhut and from the embassy as well.

This operation has been going on all day, which, of course, is night in Saigon, under difficult circumstances. And the total number of those evacuated numbers about 6,500. We will have the exact figures for you tomorrow, of which about a thousand are Americans.

Our Ambassador left—has left—and the evacuation can be said to be completed.

## 4 Americans Killed

In the period since the President spoke to the Congress, we have therefore succeeded in evacuating all of the Americans who were in South Vietnam, losing only—losing the two Marines who were, last night, to rocket fire, and two pilots today on a helicopter.

We succeeded in evacuating something on the order of 55,000 South Vietnamese and we hope that we have contributed to a political evolution that may spare the South Vietnam some of the more drastic consequences of a political change, but this remains to be seen. This last point remains to be seen.

Question: Now that it's over, could you tell us, or elaborate in more detail, what we did through various intermediaries to bring about—I think you said as humane a political solution as possible—and why those efforts seem to have failed?

Answer: Well, I would not agree with the proposition that these efforts have failed, because at least some of the efforts, especially those related to evacuation, were carried out through intermediaries.

We dealt with—I think it is premature for me to go into all of the details—but we did deal with Hanoi and with the P.R.G. through different intermediaries, and we were in the position to put our views and receive responses.

Q. May I follow that by saying, why then was it necessary to stage a rescue operation in the final stages?

A. In the final stages, it was always foreseen that a helicopter lift for some contingent would be necessary. I believe that the dynamics of the situation in South Vietnam, and the impatience of the North Vietnamese to

seize power, brought about an acceleration of events in the last day and a half.

But, you will remember, there was a period of about five days when both civilian and U.S. personnel were evacuated without any substantial opposition. In fact more than five days—about a week.

## 'A Bloody Battle?'

Q. On that point, do you now anticipate that the North Vietnamese intend to move in and forcefully seize Saigon? Do you anticipate that there will be a bloody battle of Saigon? Or, is there still a chance for an orderly transition?

A. It is very difficult to judge at this moment. I think it's important to point out that the Communist demands have been escalating as the military situation has changed in their favor. A week ago they were asking only for the removal of President Thieu. When he resigned, they immediately asked for the removal of his successor, specifying that General Minh would be acceptable.

When President Huong resigned in favor of General Minh, he was now described as a member of the clique which includes all of the members of his administration. A week ago, the Communist demand was for the removal of American military personnel. This quickly escalated into a removal of all American personnel.

Then a new demand was put forward for the dismantling of the South Vietnamese military apparatus. When that was agreed to, they add-

ed to it the demand for the dismantling of the South Vietnamese administrative apparatus.

So it is clear that what's being aimed at is a substantial political take-over. Now, whether it is possible to avoid a battle for Saigon, it is too early to judge.

I would hope, and we certainly have attempted to work in that direction, that such a battle can be avoided. And it is basically unnecessary because it seems to us that the South Vietnamese Government is prepared to draw the conclusion from the existing situation—and in fact was formed to correspond to the demands of the Communist side.

Q. Do you now favor American aid in rebuilding North Vietnam?

A. I could say that no, I do not favor American aid for rebuilding North Vietnam.

Q. How about South Vietnam?

A. Well, with respect to South Vietnam, we will have to see what kind of government emerges; and indeed, whether there's going to be a South Vietnam.

We would certainly look at particular, specific humanitarian requests that can be carried out by humanitarian agencies.

But we do believe that the primary responsibility should fall on those who supplied the weapons for this political change.

Q. Mr. Secretary, I'd like to ask a question about the length of time that it took to complete this evacuation.

A. Yes.

Q. First, the question of whether days went by after the end became obvious before ordering the evacuation; second, if after ordering it, there was a one hour delay in helicopter landings apparently caused by military confusion; third, whether the evacuation was prolonged by picking up thousands of Vietnamese instead of concentrating on Americans; and fourth, whether this was delayed by Ambassador Martin's desire to be the last man to leave the sinking ship.

In other words, I tried to put the specifics in, in order to ask you, did it take too long to get out of there, to write this last chapter?

A. We got out by—all of the personnel that was there, without panic and without the substantial casualties that could have occurred if civil order had totally broken down.

We also managed to save 56,000 people whose life was in the most severe jeopardy. And we had to make adjustment every day—how many people we thought we could safely remove without triggering a panic and at the same time still be able to carry out our principle function and the remaining functions.

I think these objectives were achieved. And they were carried out successfully. And therefore I do not believe that there was an undue delay, because an evacuation had been going on for two weeks.

The difference between the last stage and the previous period was that the last stage was done by helicopter and the previous stage had been done by fixed-wing. And I think the ability to conduct the final evacuation by helicopter without casualties during the operation—well, at least casualties caused by hostile action—is closely related to the policies that were pursued in the preceding—in the preceding two weeks.

#### On Self-Determination

As for Ambassador Martin, he was in a very difficult position. He felt a moral obligation to the people with whom he had been associated. And he attempted to save as many of those as possible. And that's not the worst fault a man can have.

Q. Mr. Kissinger, what caused the breakdown of the attempt to try to achieve a measure of self-determination for the people of South Vietnam?

A. Until Sunday night, we thought there was some considerable hope that the North Vietnamese would not seek a solution by purely military means. And when the transfer of power to General Minh took place, a person who had been designated by the other side as a counterpart worth talking to, they would be prepared to talk with—we thought that a negotiated solution in the next few days was highly probable.

Some time Sunday night, the North Vietnamese obviously changed signals. Why that is, we do not yet know. Nor do I exclude that now that the American presence is totally removed, and very little military structure is left in South Vietnam, that there may not be a sort of a negotiation; but what produced this sudden shift to a military option, or what seemed to us to be a sudden shift to a military option, I have not had a sufficient opportunity to analyze.

Now, as to the effectiveness of the Paris accord: I think it is important to remember the mood in this country at the time that the Paris accords were being negotiated.

Now, I think it is worth remembering that the principal criticism that was then made was that the terms we insisted on were too tough—not that the terms were too generous.

We wanted what was considered peace with honor—that the United States would not end a war by overthrowing a government with which it had been associated. And that still seems like an objective that was correct.

#### Other Assumptions

And there were several other assumptions that were made at that time that were later falsified by events that were beyond the control of—that were indeed, unforeseeable by anybody who negotiated these agreements, including the disintegration of, or the weakening of executive authority in the United States for reasons unconnected with foreign policy considerations.

So the premises of the Paris accord in terms of aid, of the possibility of aid, and terms of other practice, tended to disintegrate.

I see no purpose now in reviewing that particular history. Within the context of the time, it seemed the right thing to do.

Q. Looking toward the future, has America been so stunned by the experience in Vietnam that it will never again come to the military or economic aid of an ally? Could this occur in the case of Israel?

A. As I pointed out in a search a few weeks ago, it is one lesson we must learn from this experience: that we must be very careful in the commitments we make, but that we should scrupulously honor those commitments we do make.

I believe that the experience in the war—that the war has had—can make us more mature in the commitments we undertake and more determined to maintain those we have.

I would, therefore, think that with relation to other countries, including Israel, that no lesson should be drawn by the enemies of our friends from the experiences in Vietnam.

Q. Mr. Secretary, are you confident that all the Americans that wanted to come out are out of Saigon, and do you have any idea of the number of Americans who remain behind?

A. I have no idea of the number of Americans that remain behind. I'm confident that every American who wanted to come out is out. But how many chose to stay behind we won't know until tomorrow some time, until the last contingent that left was the Ambassador and some of his immediate staff, and we won't know really until we get a report from them.