

Transcript of the President's

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 17 — Following is a transcript of President Nixon's news conference today:

THE PRESIDENT: We will make this on the record today.

The mike is for the purpose of a transcription which will be available, I think, rather soon after we complete the conference because it will be run simultaneously by the stenographers.

Are there any questions which you want to ask?

1. Next Step in Indochina

Q. Mr. President, the next logical step in Southeast Asia would seem to be South Vietnamese forces moving into the southern part of North Vietnam for the same reasons that they moved into the Laotian Panhandle. Would our policy rule out support for this type of move — air support for it?

A. I won't speculate on what South Vietnam may decide to do with regard to a possible incursion into North Vietnam in order to defend their national security. However, I will restate our policy. I stated that policy on Nov. 3 and have restated it at least nine different times publicly since that time.

I stated then that — a time we are withdrawing our forces — that if I found that the enemy was stepping up his activity through infiltration in a way that would threaten our remaining forces that I would take strong action to deal with the new situation.

On Dec. 10, as you recall, I reiterated that statement and said that this action would include the use of air power against the infiltration routes, military complex supply depots.

That is our policy, the policy of the President taking action if he finds that the North Vietnamese are undertaking actions which threaten our remaining forces in South Vietnam.

2. Limitations on Forces

Q. Mr. President, under that guide, is there any limit to what we might do to protect our forces in South Vietnam?

A. We have indicated several limits. For example, we are not going to use ground forces in Laos. We are not going to use advisers in Laos with the South Vietnamese forces. We are not going to use ground forces in Cambodia or advisers in Cambodia, as we have previously indicated, and we have no intention, of course, of using ground forces in North Vietnam. Those are limitations.

Q. I had reference to our use of air power.

A. I am not going to place any limitation upon the use of air power except, of course, to rule out a rather ridiculous suggestion that is made from time to time — I think the latest by Hans Morgenthau — that our air power might include the use of tactical nuclear weapons.

As you know, Mr. Lisagor, this has been speculated on for a period of five years and I have said for a period of five years that it is not an area where the use of nuclear weapons, in any form, is either needed or would be wise.

As far as our air power is concerned, it will be directed against — and I ought to be as precise as I was on Dec. 10 — against those military activities which I determined are directed against and thereby threaten our remaining forces in South Vietnam.

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THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 1971

News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters

3. Timing of Laos Incursion

Q. Mr. President, can you tell us — sir, the idea of an incursion in Laos has been under consideration in Saigon on the military level for some years — why did you decide that now is the time to do it and, second, can you give us some kind of a status report on how it is going and what the prognosis is in terms of possible enemy resistance, what the intelligence suggests?

A. Yes. In looking at this situation, I recall, as probably some of you who were there in 1965, that some of our military people, and civilians for that matter, were then saying that the way to stop North Vietnamese infiltration into South Vietnam was to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

It was not undertaken during the previous Administration, as I understand and I can speak for this Administration — was not undertaken until now for a reason that the South Vietnamese and, for that matter, the United States, had enough on our plate in South Vietnam.

Laos would not have been possible had it not been for Cambodia, Cambodia cutting off one vital supply line and thereby practically bring enemy activity in the southern half of South Vietnam to an end; released the South Vietnamese forces, who, by this time, had not only gained confidence in Cambodia, but also had additional strength; released them for undertaking what they could not have undertaken even eight months ago, an incursion on their own into Laos with only U.S. air support.

The decision to do it now, or I think the perhaps — perhaps the decision not to do it before, is that, one, neither the United States nor the South Vietnamese felt that they apparently had the capability to do it; the second, the decision to do it now was that, based on the fact that the South Vietnamese, because of the confidence, the training they gained as the result of their actions in Cambodia, the South Vietnamese felt that they were able to undertake it. Our commanders agreed and, therefore, it was undertaken.

* INCLUDES GROUNDS
CONBAT WEAPONS? DEVALUATIONS?
LAOS OR INNES?

4. Position of Red China

Q. Could you discuss with us your evaluation of the possibility of Communist China entering into this situation now that it is expanded into Laos or if the South Vietnamese go into North Vietnam?

A. Let me refer to the situation as it presently exists rather than the hypothesis of whether the South Vietnamese might go into North Vietnam.

As far as the actions in southern Laos are concerned, they present no threat to Communist China and should not be interpreted by Communist Chinese as being a threat against them.

As you know, the Communist Chinese have been operating in northern Laos for some time, but this action is not directed against Communist China. It is directed against the North Vietnamese who are pointed towards South Vietnam and toward Cambodia.

Consequently, I do not believe that the Communist Chinese have any reason

to interpret this as a threat against them or any reason therefore to react to it.

5. Evaluation of Operation

Q. Mr. President, if I could follow up, could you give us your evaluation of how the Laotian operation is really going militarily and otherwise?

A. Incidentally, don't hesitate in this smaller forum to ask for follow-up. To the extent I can cover all the questions, I will be glad to take them.

As far as the Laotian operation is concerned, the reports that have come from the field, I think, generally give an accurate picture, except, of course, for the day-to-day tendency to hypo this or that incident into a crisis.

The operation — and I read a complete report from General Abrams this morning — has gone according to plan. The South Vietnamese have already cut three major roads — when we call them roads, let's say trails — which led from Tchepone down into Cambodia, and, of course, into South Vietnam.

The South Vietnamese have run into very heavy resistance on the road into Tchepone. We expected that resistance.

Putting it in the context of the earlier report, the Cambodia action in May and June cut one lifeline, the lifeline from Sihanoukville into the southern half of South Vietnam.

This action would either cut or seriously disrupt the other pipeline or lifeline, the lifeline coming down through Laos, the Ho Chi Minh Trail into the north half of South Vietnam.

Therefore, we expected the North Vietnamese to fight here. They have to fight here or give up the struggle to conquer South Vietnam, Cambodia, and their influence extending through other parts of Southeast Asia.

Finally, I think it is quite important to note General Abrams's evaluation which I specifically asked him to give me by cable just a few days ago, his evaluation of how the South Vietnamese are conducting themselves. They are fighting, he said, in a superior way. I use the word that he used. They are proceeding in a way that he believes that is in accordance with the plan and holding their own against enemy attack.

And he also pointed up another fact, that, of course, has been overridden by the Laotian activity — that the operation in the Chup Plantation led by General Tri is going along in a fashion much better than was expected, with a great number of enemy casualties and, as General Abrams put it, excellent performance on the part of those groups.

6. Time and Scope of Drive

Q. Mr. President, it is reported both in South Vietnam and, I think, in our statement that the operation will be limited in time and in scope. Can you define those terms?

A. By time, the operation will be limited to the time that is necessary to accomplish the objective. The objective is not to occupy any part of Laos. The South Vietnamese are not there to stay. They are there to disrupt the enemy's lines of communications, their supply lines, their infiltration routes and then to get out.

Once that is accomplished, if it is accomplished early, they will get out. If it takes a longer time, they will stay in.

There is also another limitation in terms of time. That is the weather. In the latter part of April or the early part of May, the rains come. And they would have to get out then because then the North Vietnamese also would pose no threat.

In terms of area, space, it is limited to the specific area that you see on the maps here, in terms of cutting across the trails — and it is more than one trail, there are three or four trails — the trails that are the supply lines on which the North Vietnamese operate.



Associated Press

FIRING ON THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL: A South Vietnamese artillery unit shells a suspected enemy position along the supply line through southern Laos. The Vietnamese were airlifted into position by United States Army helicopters.

7. Troop Withdrawals

Q. Would you have any further word on troop withdrawals for us at this time, or when can you tell us about further troop withdrawals?

A. I will make a further announcement on troop withdrawals, as I have indicated, before the May 1 period when the last troop period will have expired.

By that time, as you know, 265,000 Americans will have been withdrawn, and the further withdrawal announcement will be made then.

I can say today that, as a result partially of our success in Cambodia, and based on also the present success of the Laotian operation, that the troop withdrawal program will go forward on schedule.

I should also point out, however, that as far as this year is concerned, even if the Laotian operation had not been undertaken by the South Vietnamese with our air support, the troops withdrawal program could have gone ahead on schedule.

What this relates to, insofar as American troop withdrawals are concerned,

is not this year, but next year. Next year will be a year when the Vietnamization program's very success creates the greatest point of danger, because then the number of ground combat troops that we will have in South Vietnam will be lower.

8. Prospects for Next Year

Q. If this is a great success, this could go next year much farther. Is that a right inference?

A. When I made the announcement about moving into Cambodia, I said that its purpose was to insure our troop withdrawal, to reduce our casualties. And we hope to shorten the war. It has had those effects. Our casualties, even in this past week in which we have moved in with air support, in support of the South Vietnamese, and have suffered some air losses, were only half of what they were in the same week before Cambodia.

So, casualties are down, and I should point out that casualties in the first month that we came into office were five times as great as they were in the month of January. One is too many. But that, at least, is progress in terms of casualties.

In terms of troop withdrawals, the Cambodian incursion insured it and allowed us, as a matter of fact, to set our sights somewhat higher.

The success of this operation guarantees the continued program and gives the prospect of a greater troop withdrawal during the months ahead.

I am not going to speculate, however, as to what the troop withdrawal announcement will be on April 15th. We will deal with the situation at that time and, at that time, we will not yet see the end of the Laotian operation.

9. Ground Combat Role

Q. Mr. President, if I could follow that up, is it possible to say now, without talking about numbers of troops to be withdrawn, when the United States might be able to forgo a ground combat role in South Vietnam?

A. There will be an announcement on that score at some point. I am not going to indicate it now.

At this time, when the negotiations are going on at Paris still — when I say negotiations with no progress — we are not going to remove any incentive for a possible negotiation by announcing what our plans are further down the road.

10. Prisoner-of-War Issue

Q. Mr. President, my question does follow his somewhat. How far can you go in withdrawing U.S. troops without a resolution of the prisoner-of-war issue? A. As I have indicated, and as everyone I am sure would agree, as long as the North Vietnamese have any Americans as prisoners-of-war, there will be Americans in South Vietnam and enough Americans to give them an incentive to release the prisoners.

11. Action by Congress

Q. Mr. President, could I follow that up. Would you be willing to join with Congress, as Senator Javits has suggested, in a resolution saying that it is our intention to withdraw all troops from South Vietnam? A. Not needed, because, you see, in my October speech, as you will recall, I called for a ceasefire, I called for a political settlement, and I also called for a total withdrawal of all forces if it was mutual. So, the policy of this Government is for a total withdrawal, provided there is a withdrawal by the other side.

12. Black Congressmen

Q. Mr. President, would you explain why you have not found time to see these 12 black Congressmen who have been asking to see you for about a year?

A. I talked to Senator Brooke about that just a few days ago and asked him to speak to some of those who had made this request.

As you know, I have seen a great number of Congressmen and, of course, not only these 12, but all the members of Congress, by the time I finish the breakfast tomorrow, will have been invited to the White House since the new Congress came here.

Some have not accepted. But Senator Brooke now has been talking with, I understand, Congressman Diggs, whom I know — and I know several of them, several of the older ones at least from previously serving with them — and I think that a meeting is going to be worked out. I hope it is, because I will be glad to talk to them, of course.

13. The Supreme Court

Q. Mr. President, are you happier with the performance of the Supreme Court this year than you were in 1968 while you were campaigning, and do you anticipate any appointments this term? A. Well, the second part of the question, of course, would be presumptuous for me to comment upon, because there are no —

Q. There are no resignations on your desk, obviously.

A. No, I think I would know about it if there were. But I have no indication of any intention to resign.

With regard to the Supreme Court's decisions, I don't believe that I should comment upon the wisdom of their decisions. I have great confidence in those that I have appointed to the Court and I have great respect for others who are on the Court, with whom I happen to disagree. But I won't comment on that.

14. Submarine Off Cuba

Q. How concerned are you about the presence of a Soviet nuclear submarine in Cuban waters?

A. On Dec. 10 [the President was referring to his statement of Jan. 4] you may recall I said that if a nuclear submarine were serviced from Cuba or in Cuba, that this would be a violation of our understanding with regard to the Soviet Union's activities in putting offensive weapons or a base in Cuba.

As far as this submarine is concerned, the question is a rather technical one, whether it is there for a port call or whether it is there for servicing. We are watching it very closely. The Soviet Union is aware of the fact that we consider that there is an understanding and we will, of course, bring the matter to their attention if we find that the understanding is violated.

15. Integration of Housing

Q. Mr. President, may I ask you about racial integration in suburban housing, a subject that you have treated twice this year, and you expressed your opposition to forced integration, and have said you will do what the law requires. In the meantime, the Third Circuit has handed down a decision which would seem to put an increased burden on H.U.D. to move public housing into the suburbs and a major case has been instituted in Blackjack, Mo. The Federal Government has yet to announce its intention in regard to either of those cases. Will you appeal, will you enter the Blackjack case, and what do you see as the over-all role of the national Administration in this area?

A. To try to answer all of the questions, let me come first to the attitude of the Administration with regard to the Blackjack case.

The Attorney General and H.U.D. jointly are considering the Blackjack case and I understand within approximately 30 days will have a recommendation to me as to what action should be taken with regard to compliance with that case.

I will not indicate anything further from that. I will have something more to say when I get the recommendations from the Attorney General and H.U.D.

With regard to what you call, and I have called — I think you did not say this — that what I have called forced integration, let me just spend a moment indicating what I believe is the law in this country and where I think the law's limits are.

First, this Administration will enforce the law of the land which provides for open housing. Open cities, open suburbs, open neighborhoods are now a right for every American.

Second, however, this Administration will not go beyond the law or in violation of the law by going beyond it by using Federal power, Federal coercion or Federal money to force economic integration of neighborhoods.

What we will do, however, and what we are doing, is to try to give every American, and particularly Americans in minority groups, black Americans, for example, a greater opportunity to exercise a right. A right, for example, to live in any neighborhood means nothing unless you have got a job or a position which pays you enough to afford the house.

16. Crossing Into DMZ

Q. Mr. President, if the Army of South Vietnam sought to cross the DMZ in force, would you give a mind to restrain such action? A. Excuse me, the Army of South or North Vietnam?

Q. South Vietnam, if the ARVN in the South would cross the DMZ.

A. I would not speculate on what South Vietnam may do in defense of its national security. South Vietnam now, as we withdraw, has an ever-increasing responsibility to defend itself.

South Vietnam will have to make decisions with regard to its ability to defend itself. I will only speak with regard to what the American action will be.

The American action will be, according to the guideline I laid down a moment ago, the use of air power where I believe that North Vietnam's action may threaten our forces.

17. Diplomatic Initiative

Q. Mr. President, if the Laos operation goes according to your expectations and has as much success as you hope, is it likely to be followed by any new diplomatic initiative and effort to get the Paris talks going?

A. Mr. Potter, the matter of diplomat-

ic initiatives is something that we have been discussing constantly within the Administration. As a matter of fact, I have been talking to the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense, Dr. Kissinger and others, both informally and in formal meetings.

I have nothing to report today, but I do want to say this: that we will continue to pursue the diplomacy for a primary reason, the primary reason being to negotiate some settlement of the P.O.W. issue.

We have to realize that, as far as the negotiations affecting a political settlement for South Vietnam is concerned, time is running out for the North Vietnamese if they expect to negotiate with the United States. Because, as our forces come out of South Vietnam, it means that the responsibility for the negotiations increasingly, then, becomes that of South Vietnam.

But I can only say that, looking to the future, we constantly are re-examining the possibility of any diplomatic initiatives. However, I believe that what I stated in October is a very far-reaching, a very comprehensive, and a very fair proposal, and we stand on that at this time.

I do not want to suggest that there are any more concessions coming from our side to North Vietnam. We are not going to make any more concessions. The time is for them to next act on the principles that we have laid down.

18. Construction Industry

Q. Mr. President, I have a question on the economy. Sir, the construction industry and the unions apparently are not going to be able to come up with a voluntary plan to hold down wage and price increases. What actions will you take?

A. Secretary Hodgson is going to report to me Monday when he returns from Miami, where, as you know, he has been meeting with the leaders of the construction industry.

I will not indicate now what action we will take until I get his report. But there will be action. The reason there has to be action in this field, in addition to the reasons that all of you have in your various columns and reports have indicated, I would put it very simply as this: The construction industry is a sick industry. It is a sick industry not because of the quality of construction in the United States — it is the highest quality construction in the world — but because it has had too rich a diet.

When you find that wage increases — wage increases have been high in a number of industries, but when they are an average of 16 per cent, what has happened is that that has not helped the workers in the construction industry except those that are employed.

We find that unemployment in the construction industry is double the national average, and we also find that the Federal Government has a major stake in this because, looking at this budget, I have found that \$14-billion of our budget in the next fiscal year will go into construction.

With that kind of financial interest in construction, it is essential that the Federal Government use its power to the extent that it can to bring about more reasonable settlements with that industry — wage and price stability.

Having stated that goal, you are all aware of some of the actions that have been discussed. I will consider them all and then make a decision and we will announce it when it is made.

19. Incursion by Hanoi

Q. Mr. President, may I ask a question, if I could get back to Vietnam for just one moment? There has been quite a bit of speculation about the possibility of the North Vietnamese coming down through the DMZ. Would this scrap any obligations that you may have under the bombing ban on the North, and would you be in a position then of having to retaliate for any crossing of the DMZ?

A. My action in case that happened — and I do not believe it will happen — but my action will be guided by the same principles that I have laid down before. I would use the power of the United States, and particularly its power in the air, to the extent that I consider it necessary to protect our remaining forces in South Vietnam.

We have a considerable number of forces, as you know, on the DMZ. The blocking forces along Route 9, before you get to the border of Laos, are primarily American. I will not allow those forces to be endangered by a massive North Vietnamese incursion, if one should be undertaken.

I think the very fact that the North Vietnamese know that I intend to take strong action to deal with that incursion means that they are not going to take it. If they do, I can assure you that — I don't want to assure you, I simply want to have the record clear that I would not be bound, of course, by any so-called understandings which they have already violated at the time of the bombing halt.

20. Enforcement of the Law

Q. Mr. president, a few minutes ago, in response to Mr. O'Rourke's question, you referred to your views on forced integration, a word you said you have used before. I am a little puzzled by the distinction between forced integration and enforcement of the laws which are on the books which you, as you properly said, were pledged to enforce, those laws against discrimination. Where does this line come between those two concepts in your mind?

A. In the one case, the laws on the books deal, as they properly should, with human rights, the rights of an individual to buy a house, or an apartment, or rent a house or an apartment and not be barred because of his racial, religious or other background.

In the other case, what we are talking about is economic considerations having to do primarily with the zoning.

Where this is involved, it seems to me there is a clear distinction. The law does not require, and if it does not require, in my opinion — does not allow the Federal Government to use its monetary and other power, coercive power for the purpose of changing the economic pattern of a neighborhood.

I think what the law does require is that there be open neighborhoods. The law does not require that the Federal Government step in and provide in a

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carry any message from you, harsh, general or otherwise?

A. Secretary Hodgson had a long discussion with me and with other leaders in the Administration prior to his going down. We developed a plan and we also gave him several options which he could discuss with the leaders of the labor unions. He is a very persuasive man.

I am not going to concede that he struck out until he tells me so himself. But if he has, then we will be up to bat.

22. Reaction to Revenue Sharing

Q. Mr. President, have you been disappointed with the reaction in Congress to your revenue-sharing plan and what do you feel about the prospects of that right now?

A. No, I am not disappointed. All reforms have rough sledding. When we consider reforms, we must remember that they are always opposed by the Establishment. And by the Establishment I don't refer to what we used to talk about in 1964, as some used to talk about, the Eastern Establishment — I am referring to the Establishment of Congress, the Establishment of Federal bureaucracy and also great organizations, labor organizations, farm organizations, business organizations have all gotten used to dealing with Government as it is, and they are always afraid to change.

As far as the Congress is concerned and the bureaucracy is concerned, as I pointed out in the State of the Union, they are very, very reluctant to give up power. We expected a difficult time in getting revenue sharing through.

But let me put it, if I can, in other terms. We have been talking about foreign policy. We in Washington in Government live at the very summit of government. And here we do find opposition, dug-in establishmentarians fighting for the status quo or for just a little change, or for putting more money into existing programs rather than really reforming them.

That is the case here. But that is what is happening at the summit. Down in the valleys, where the people live, you will find there that the people in the front lines, the leaders in the front lines, the Governors, the Mayors, the county officials, an overwhelming majority of them re for revenue sharing — both general revenue sharing and the other — an overwhelming majority, and also an overwhelming majority of the people of this country are for revenue sharing.

Eventually, then, it will be approved. I am not suggesting exactly in the form we have submitted it, but it will be approved because those of us who are in Washington have to reflect eventually what the majority of the people of this country feel.

And as I look at the situation now, I would say I expected that we would have this kind of opposition. However, I must say that the favorable reaction that we have had at the grass roots and among Governors and Mayors and county officials has been greater than I expected, and that will be the deciding factor in getting it through.

23. Accounting Procedures

Q. What do you visualize with regard to accounting procedures on this, what the G.A.O. goal would be for the states, county and city governments?

A. First, let's distinguish the procedures with regard to civil rights guarantees. Those procedures, of course, will be set up in our revenue-sharing programs and the civil rights laws and requirements will be enforced.

We cannot have programs that are paid for by the tax money of all the people and benefit only some of the people. Second, however, with regard to accounting procedures, I can assure you that, despite some speculation on this score, we don't intend to set up a huge network of bureaucrats to go down and examine the cities and counties and states with regard to whether or not they are properly expending funds.

What we are going to do there is to try to handle each case on an individual basis: naturally, take action where there is a failure to use the funds properly, but not to set up simply more government guidelines.

24. Jarring Proposal to Israel

Q. Could you take a couple of seconds on the Middle East, because it has not been brought up and I think it should be? A. Sure.

Q. Israel seems to be balking on the Jarring proposal. If they continue to balk, would you use your power of persuasion to get them to accept something along that line?

A. I don't think it would be helpful, Mr. Warren, to speculate here that we would use powers of persuasion with Israel or, for that matter, with Egypt or Jordan, on the Middle East.

Let me say this: that I have been encouraged — am not overly optimistic and not Pollyannish, because this is a terribly difficult area of the world, as I have pointed out in previous press conferences, with hatreds that go back over the centuries, and they are not going to be removed very easily, and maybe never. But a live-and-let-have relationship may develop. But I have been encouraged by the developments that have occurred so far.

Egypt has been more forthcoming than we had expected and I believe that Israel has been somewhat more forthcoming. I have hopes that when the present cease-fire expires that it will be extended.

I will say that neither side will gain anything by starting the fighting again. It is a war in which either side will be a loser.

So as far as the Mideast is concerned — I answered it in more detail simply to give you the tone of it — it is a difficult area. There are going to be day-to-day blasts by one side or the other or concessions by one side or the other before an eventual settlement is reached.

But for the United States publicly to move in and indicate what we think

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ought to be done while these delicate negotiations go on would not help.

25. Decisions by U.S.

Q. Could I clear up what I think is an important point on Laos? You suggested that the Saigon regime is making the decisions as to what it will do in its own interest, particularly in reference to crossing the DMZ. Most Americans believe that the decision to go into Laos was made in Washington and decisions like crossing the DMZ would have, necessarily, to be made here as well because of the use of American air power.

Could you straighten out for us where the line is between the decisions that the Saigon regime will make and that this Government will make?

A. Any decision, Mr. Lisagor, that called for American participation would have to be approved in Washington. The decision with regard to Laos was one that was approved in Washington.

I approved the operation and I approved the decision to use American air power. The operation itself was jointly developed, primarily by the South Vietnamese, but with, of course, very close cooperation and consultation with General Abrams and his staff.

But wherever America participation to any extent is required, you can be sure that that decision will be made here.

When you put it in terms of what would happen in the event the South Vietnamese went into North Vietnam, I am not going to speculate on what they will or will not do. I will only say that any American participation has to be approved here.

If South Vietnam's decision with regard to what they do would depend upon American cooperation, then, of course, it could not be undertaken without our approval.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.