

Transcript of President Nixon's News

WASHINGTON, Nov. 12—Following, as made available by the White House, is a transcript of President Nixon's news conference today:

OPENING STATEMENT

Won't you be seated, ladies and gentlemen?

Ladies and gentlemen, I have an announcement of a substantially increased troop withdrawal from Vietnam. When I entered office on Jan. 20, 1969, there were 540,000 Americans in Vietnam and our casualties were running as high as 800 a week.

Over the past three years, we have made progress on both fronts. Our casualties, for example, for the past five weeks have been less than 10, instead of 300, a week, and with regard to withdrawals, 80 per cent of those who were there have come home—365,000.

I have now had an opportunity to appraise the situation as it is today. I have consulted with my senior advisers and I have an up-to-date report from Secretary Laird.

Based on those consultations and consultations with the Government of South Vietnam, I am now able to make this announcement: Over the next two months, we will withdraw 45,000 Americans. I will make another announcement before the First of February. As far as that second announcement is concerned, before the First of February, the number to be withdrawn—the rate that is—as well as the duration of the announcement, will be determined by three factors.

First, by the level of enemy activity and particularly by the infiltration route and its rate, because if the level of enemy activity and infiltration substantially increases, it could be very dangerous to our sharply decreased forces in South Vietnam.

Second, the progress of our training program, our Vietnamization program in South Vietnam, and third, any progress that may have been made with regard to two major objectives we have, obtaining the release of all our P.O.W.'s wherever they are in Southeast Asia and obtaining a cease-fire for all of Southeast Asia.

Those three criteria will determine the next announcement, both its duration and its rate.

Now, I will be glad to take questions on this announcement or any other subject, domestic or foreign, you would like to make.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Laos and Cambodia

Q. Mr. President, to be clear on the cease-fire, that includes Laos and Cambodia as well as South Vietnam?

A. That is our goal, Mr. Lisagor. Yes, sir. As you know, we offered that in my talks of last year in October. We have been continuing to offer it. We would, of course, believe that attaining that goal would bring peace to the whole area, which is what we want, and of course would greatly reduce any need for a very heavy American aid program that presently we have for particularly Cambodia.

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a new troop ceiling at the end of the withdrawal period?

A. It will be a new troop ceiling for the end of the withdrawal period. I think we would have to cover that later. The 45,000 should be taken off the present ceiling. We are reducing the ceiling by 45,000.

Now, incidentally, I should say, too, that in terms of the withdrawal, I think it would be proper to inform the press on this matter. We are going to withdraw 25,000 in December and 20,000 in January. Obviously we would like to get a few more out before Christmas and we were able to do this after Secretary Laird made his report.

Q. In this present situation, you are announcing a two- or three-months—

A. Two months.

Q. Two-months withdrawal, whereas the last time it was seven or eight months, I believe. How does this situation, in terms of negotiating need that you spoke of, differ from the other one and can you tell us if you now, as a result of this two-month withdrawal, foresee an end to the United States combat role in Vietnam?

A. Well, first, the situation is very different because, as we get down in numbers, each withdrawal has a much more dramatic effect on the percentage that we had there; 45,000 as against, for example, 184,000, which is the present troop ceiling, is a lot different from 25,000 as against 539,000 or 540,000, which was our first withdrawal program.

So, consequently, it is essential, as we get closer to the end, if we are going to maintain any negotiating leverage, that the withdrawal periods, in my opinion, be somewhat shorter.

With regard to the other questions that we have on this—does that cover that point?

Q. Yes, sir. About the combat role, though.

A. Well, the combat role, let us understand, based on the casualties, as far as the offensive situation is concerned, is already concluded. American troops are now in a defensive position. They, however, will defend themselves, and what casualties we have taken—they are very small—will be taken in that defensive role.

You will find, as you analyze the battlefield reports, as I do from time to time, that the offensive activity, search and destroy, and all the other activity that we used to undertake, are now being undertaken by the South Vietnamese.

2. Prisoners of War

Q. Mr. President, do you have any reason for encouragement on the release of prisoners of war from any source?

A. No reason for encouragement that I can talk about publicly. I can say, however, that we are pursuing this subject as I have indicated on several occasions in a number of channels and we have not given up. We will never give up with regard to our prisoners of war. That is one of the reasons why an announcement is being made for a shorter period rather than a longer period, because the moment that we make an announcement that is too long, it means that whatever negotiating stroke we might have is substantially reduced.

3. Infiltration by Enemy

Q. Mr. President, what has been the most recent trend towards the infiltration by the enemy and do you have figures for that and also, what rate would have to be maintained for you to carry out your optimum plan?

A. We would have to examine that situation at the time. The infiltration rate has come up some as it always does at this time of year. However, it is not as high now, just as the casualties are not as high now and the level of enemy activity as it was last year. We want to see however, what the situation is in December and January, which, as you all know, are the key months when infiltration comes along, because that will determine what the activity will be in April, May, June and July on the battlefield.

Q. Mr. President.

A. Yes, Mr. Bailey.

4. February Troop Ceiling

Q. To be clear, what is your new Feb. 1 troop ceiling or are you doing it the way you have done it before by setting

5. Role of U.S. Troops

Q. Mr. President, have you sent or are you sending orders to the forces in South Vietnam regarding the offensive and defensive role? Could you outline that for us?

A. That is a matter which is worked out by General Abrams in the field, and it is one that has just gradually come about. No orders need to be given for that purpose. And, incidentally, that is possible due to the fact that the South Vietnamese have gained the capability to handle the situation themselves.

Also, there is another reason. As we get to 184,000, and at the end of this period, 45,000 less than that, what offensive capabilities we have are very, very seriously limited.

6. Peace Negotiation

Q. Mr. President, you said there was no movement on the prisoners-of-war issue. Is there anything at all to report on negotiations either through Paris or through some other means?

A. I would respond to that only by saying that we have not given up on the negotiating front. This announcement is somewhat of an indication that we have not given up on the negotiating front. I, however, would not like to leave the impression that we see the possibility of some striking breakthrough in negotiations in the near future.

But we are pursuing negotiations in Paris and through whatever other channels we think are appropriate.

7. Private P.O.W. Talks

Q. One might infer from what you said previously that there has been progress on the prisoner question privately. Would that be a correct inference to draw?

A. No, it would not be a correct inference to draw. I wish it were, because this issue should, of course, as well all, I think, be separated from the issue of the combat role of Americans and our withdrawal program. It is a humanitarian issue. We have not, as yet, had any progress in our talks with the North Vietnamese in getting them to separate that issue from the rest.

On the other hand, we have not given up on the negotiating track, and we are going to continue to press on that track because that is the track on which we eventually are going to have success in getting our prisoners back.

8. Progress on Prisoners

Q. There has been no progress, either



The New York Times/Mike Lien

ANNOUNCES NEW TROOP CUTS: President Nixon at the news conference

publicly or privately, on getting release of our prisoners?

A. I do not want to give any false encouragement to those who are the next of kin or who are close relatives of our prisoners. I can only say, however, that we, on our part, have taken initiatives on a number of fronts here. So the possibility of progress in the future is there. As far as the enemy's position is concerned, it is still intransigent.

9. Air Power in Vietnam

Q. Mr. President, from the conditions that you know now in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, can you foresee in the near future a substantial diminution of American air power use in support of the Vietnamese?

A. Well, air power of course, as far as our use of it is concerned, will continue to be used longer than our ground forces, due to the fact that training Vietnamese to handle the aircraft takes the longest lead time, as we know, and we will continue to use it in support of the South Vietnamese until there is a negotiated settlement or, looking further down the road, until the South Vietnamese have developed the capability to handle the situation themselves.

As far as our air power is concerned, let me also say this: As we reduce the number of our forces, it is particularly important for us to continue our air strikes on the infiltration routes. If we see any substantial set-up in infiltration in the passes, for example, which lead from North Vietnam into Laos and, of course, the Laotian trail which comes down through Cambodia into South Vietnam—if we see that, we will have to step them up.

That is why we have been quite categorical with regard to that situation, because as the number of our forces goes down, their danger increases, and we are not going to allow the enemy to pounce on them by reason of our failure to use air power against increased infiltrations, if it occurs.

10. Peking-Moscow Trip

Q. Mr. President, do you expect to discuss methods, possibly, to help alleviate the situation in Indochina in your visit to Peking and to Moscow?

A. I do not think it would be helpful to indicate at this time what we will discuss with regard to Indochina when our visits to Peking and Moscow take place. We are hopeful and continue to be hopeful that we can make progress on handling this problem ourselves, and that it may not have to be a problem that will have to be discussed in those areas.

Incidentally, I think it would not be well to speculate as to what, if anything, either Peking or Moscow can or will do on this matter. All that I can say is that we are charting our own course, and we will find our own way to bring it to a halt.

We will, of course, welcome any assistance; but we are not counting on it from either source.

11. North Vietnam's Strength

Q. Is it not true that at this particular point the North Vietnamese are probably at their weakest they have been since the war, and is this because of floods and lack of resources?

A. The major reason they are the weakest since the war is because of Cambodia and Laos, and the floods, of

course, have hurt them, too.
Miss Thomas?

12. '68 Campaign Promise

Q. In connection with your answer on negotiations, is what you are saying that perhaps you might not be able to keep your 1968 promise to end the war, which I believe was your campaign pledge, rather than just ending America's role in the war?

A. I would suggest that I be judged at the time of the campaign, rather than now, on that. I would also suggest that every promise that I have made I have kept to this date and that usually is a pretty good example of what you might do with regard to future promises.

13. Residual U.S. Forces

Q. Mr. President, we read much speculation that you plan to keep a residual force, 40,000 or 50,000 men, in Vietnam until the prisoner-of-war issue is settled completely and all prisoners are out. Is that still valid?

A. Well, Mrs. Cornell [Laughter.]

Q. Touche. [Laughter.]

A. First, if the situation is such that we have a negotiated settlement, naturally that means a total withdrawal of all American forces. It also not only means a total withdrawal of American forces in South Vietnam, it means a discontinuation of our air strikes and also withdrawal of forces stationed in other places in Southeast Asia or in the Asian theater that are directly related to the support of our forces in Vietnam.

That is, in other words, what is involved if we can get a negotiated settlement. If we do not get a negotiated settlement, then it is necessary to maintain a residual force for not only the reason—and this is, of course, a very primary reason—of having something to negotiate with, with regard to our prisoners, but it is also essential to do so in order to continue our role of leaving South Vietnam in a position where it will be able to defend itself from a Communist take-over.

Both objectives can be fulfilled, we believe, through a negotiated settlement. We would prefer that. If they are not fulfilled through a negotiated settlement, then we will have to go another route and we are prepared to do so.

14. Amnesty for Exiles

Q. Mr. President, do you foresee granting amnesty to any of the young men who have fled the United States to avoid fighting in a war that they consider to be immoral?

A. No.

15. Arms Limitation Talks

Q. Mr. President, you met this afternoon with our SALT negotiating team, which is returning to Vienna. Earlier this year you expressed the hope that some kind of agreement could be made. Do you foresee some kind of SALT agreement before the end of the year?

A. We have made significant progress in the arms limitation talks. The progress, for example, with regard to the hot line and the progress with regard to accidental war is quite significant. Also, we have made significant progress in the discussion on limitation of defensive weapons and we are beginning now to move into discussions on offensive weapons.

Whether we are able to reach agreement by the end of the year, I think,

is highly improbable at this point. I say highly improbable—not impossible. It depends on what happens.

Our goal is—and I discussed this at great length with Mr. Gromyko when he was here—our goal is, of course, at the highest level to urge our negotiators to try to find a common basis for agreement. But it must be a joint agreement. We cannot limit defensive weapons first and then limit offensive weapons. Both must go together. It will happen.

I would say this: I believe we are going to reach an agreement. I believe we will make considerable progress toward reaching that agreement before the end of the year. I think reaching the agreement before the end of the year is probably not likely at this time, but great progress will be made and I think by the end of the year we will be able to see then that our goal can be achieved.

16. Wage-Price Guidelines

Q. Mr. President, are you satisfied with the guidelines laid down by the pay commission and the price board and are you concerned about the effect of a likely bulge of increases in wages and prices after the freeze and public confidence on Phase Two?

A. Well, the possibility of some bulge, of course, has always been there, as you know, so when I announced the freeze it was widely speculated that once the freeze was off and once we then moved to guidelines, that there would be therefore some increase in wage rates and some increase also in prices. The freeze could not be kept on indefinitely.

However, I think the decisions of both the pay board and the price board have been very sound. They did not, in some instances, perhaps, reach the goals some would have liked. I think some businessmen thought the wage increases should have been in the neighborhood of 3 to 4 per cent. That would have been a very good thing from their standpoint, perhaps. It would have been totally unrealistic. It would have broke the board wide open.

I think 5.5 per cent is an achievable goal. That would be a substantial reduction insofar as the wage-price push for 1971, as compared to 1960, 1969, and 1968.

As far as prices are concerned, the guidelines that have been laid down would cut the rate of inflation approximately in half. That is real progress.

One other point I should make. I noticed that many of you very properly have written about the uncertainty with regard to Phase Two. That is inevitable. It is inevitable in any free economy. We can have total certainty only with total control of the economy. But with a totalitarian economy we have no freedom as far as our economy is concerned and we would destroy the major advantage the United States has in its competitive position in the world, in other words, the free-enterprise system.

I believe that this answer of the pay board and the price commission is a very realistic one. I believe it will succeed and one of the major reasons I believe it will succeed is the enormous public support that we had not only during the 90-day period, but that we continue to have for the period after the freeze. That public support will make this work.

Q. Mr. President, could I be quite clear on the withdrawal?

A. You mean "perfectly clear," right?
[Laughter.]

Q. Is the 45,000 to be taken from the 184,000, sir? Does it come from the Dec. 1 target figure?

A. Yes, that is right. You take your ceiling of Dec. 1 and take 45,000 from that and you get where we will be on Feb. 1. Let me point out, incidentally, that we are always slightly below our ceiling, as you know, with regard to actual withdrawals. But we have set as the ceiling for Feb. 1 the 45,000 from 184,000, but we will probably be below that at that time by a few hundred or maybe even a few thousand.

17. Date for Peking Trip

Q. Mr. President, have you set a date to go to China yet?

A. I have nothing to announce on that at this time.

18. Reaction of Thieu

Q. Mr. President, if we can assume that President Thieu was informed at least of the withdrawals, can you tell us what his reaction was?

A. Complete approval. President Thieu, along with General Abrams, and General Binh and the others who work together in the combined joint chiefs over there, have been, just as Secretary Laird has reported, enormously impressed with the speed of the training program and the ability of the South Vietnamese to defend themselves.

It has gone faster than we had thought, and also, as was pointed out by

one of the earlier questioners here, the level of enemy activity has not been as great as it was, due to the fact that the enemy doesn't have the punch it had. Cambodia took a great deal out of the enemy's punch. Laos took a great deal out of its punch. And in addition to that, those torrential floods have made it difficult for the enemy to be as effective in its attacks as it was previously.

That does not mean, however, looking to the future, that we must not be on guard. That is why I said we are going to watch this infiltration route and rate very, very carefully in the critical months of December and January, before making another withdrawal announcement.

19. Aid for Cambodians

Q. Mr. President, in your most recent foreign aid bill, you requested a total of \$341-million in military and economic aid for Cambodia. The head of the Government of Cambodia has just renounced democracy as a viable form of government, which some people think has analogy to earlier developments in Vietnam. What assurance can you give the American people that we are not sliding into another Vietnam in Cambodia?

A. We didn't slide into Vietnam. That is the difference. In Vietnam, conscious decisions were made to send Americans there to become involved in combat. I am not criticizing the decision; I am reflecting what the situation was.

It was not a question of sliding in; but was a question of decisions being made, first, to send American combat troops in. Those were first made by President Kennedy, the first troops that went in; and then the decisions to bomb in the north. Those were made by President Johnson, and the increases in forces.

Let's look at Cambodia. We have made a conscious decision not to send American troops in. There are no American combat troops in Cambodia. There are no American combat advisers in Cambodia. There will be no American combat troops or advisers in Cambodia.

We will aid Cambodia. Cambodia is the Nixon doctrine in its purest form. Vietnam was in violation of the Nixon Doctrine. Because in Cambodia what we are doing is helping the Cambodians to help themselves, and we are doing that rather than to go in and do the fighting ourselves, as we did in Korea and as we did in Vietnam. We hope not to make that mistake again if we can avoid it.

20. Stock Market Advice

Q. Mr. President, in May of 1970, when stocks hit their biggest low of the year, you gave counsel to buy. Now that we have reached the biggest low in 1971, what is your counsel today to the American investor?

A. Don't sell. [laughter].

I would like to comment on that particular matter, because if my advice had been taken, you would have done reasonably well then, as you know. As I said in Detroit, whether it is investments in stocks or bonds, or, for that matter, in real property, which is my only source of investment, if I may paraphrase what one of the television commercials I have heard often enough, I am bullish on America. However, I would strongly advise anybody who invests to invest on the long term, not the short term.

On the long term, 1972 is going to be a good year. When we see, for example, inflation cut in half, which is our goal, when we see employment beginning to rise—it rose over a million during the period of the freeze—and when we see something else, when we see our economy now being built on the basis of peace rather than war, this is a time when people looking to the future, planning to hang on, could, it seems to me, well invest in America with the hope that their investments will prove well.

1968, for example, was a very bad time to buy, and yet it appeared to be like the best of times. Stocks were high. Unemployment was low. Everybody thought we had high prosperity, but prosperity was based on 300 American casualties a week, 500,000 Americans in Vietnam, 25 to 30 billion dollars being spent on a war in Vietnam and on a burgeoning rate of inflation.

At that time, therefore, I would not have advised, and I trust many brokers did not advise their clients, to buy, because when prosperity is based on war and inflation, you are eventually going to have a setback.

The new prosperity that we are working toward—and we have some rocky times; we have had some and we may have some more—but looking toward the year 1972, as I appraise the situation, the new prosperity, based on jobs in peacetime, on peace production primarily, and based on a checked rate of inflation, will be a much sounder prosperity and, therefore, a better time to invest in America.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.