Transcript of President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters

Following is a transcript of President Ford's broadcast news conference last night, as recorded by The New York Times:

OPENING STATEMENT

Good evening and will you please sit down.

Before we start the questions tonight, I should like to make a statement on the subject of assistance to Cambodia and to Vietnam.

There are three issues. The first, the future of the people who live there. It is the concern that is humanitarian. Good for those who hunger and medical supplies for the men and women and children who are suffering the ravages of war.

We seek to stop the bloodshed and the horror and the tragedy that we see on television as rockets are fired wantonly into Phnom Penh.

I would like to be able to say that the killing would cease if we were to stop our aid but that is not the case.

The record shows in both Vietnam and Cambodia that Communist takeover of an area does not bring an end to the fighting but rather the very end of a political settlement.

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QUESTION:

1. Assurances on Cambodia

Q. Mr. President, you would stop time—what can you give us any assurance that even if the aid is voted it will get there in time? Is it stockpiled and ready to roll, or what is the situation?

A. If we don't give the aid, there is no hope. If we do get the necessary legislation from the Congress and the Administration, I will have in the next 10 days or two weeks—will it be possible to get the necessary aid to Cambodia, both economic assistance, humanitarian, military assistance? I believe there is a hope that we can help our friends to continue long enough to get into the wet season when we need it. The last time there was a period of negotiation which I think offers the best hope for a cease-fire in Cambodia.

3. Apathy Over Southeast Asia

Q. You say that there would be a deep sense of shame in the country if Cambodia should fall. If that would be true, how can you explain why it seems to be such a broad feeling of apathy in the country and also in the Congress for providing any more aid for either Cambodia or South Vietnam?

A. I don't think you can, because the prospects are that with the kind of military assistance and economic and humanitarian assistance, that the Government forces hopefully can hold out. Now, if we don't think the prospects are as pinched as Pinot Ponni will be overrun, we know from previous experiences that the controlling of a community or an area results in murder and the bloodshed that comes when they plug up and shut off the people who were the school teachers, the leaders, the government officials.

This was told very dramatically to me yesterday by several members of the Congress who were there and talked to some of the people who were in some of these communities or villages that it is an unbearable horror story and as long as we hold out and can hold out—and I think the prospects are encouraging—then I think we will avoid that kind of massacre and tremendous suffering of people who really don't deserve that kind of treatment.

Q. If I may follow up, as I understand it, the American military forces are not on the ground yet. Is it possible to have a negotiated settlement, a BIOS/? Is that correct?

A. Yes, and you indicated in your statement that the United Nations has been asked to participate in the negotiations, I think it's true that we have the possibility of a negotiated settlement, not a BIOS but that is correct.

Q. And you just yesterday indicated in your statement the State Department listed at least six successful efforts to negotiate an end to the war in Cambodia dating from the summer of 1973 when American bombing stopped there. The Cambodian Government was certainly strong enough, then, that it was not just a Biologicals or another BIOS.

A. Well, I think if you look at that, that list of bios that you indicate negotiated efforts, a lot of good came when the enemies felt that it would be better to negotiate than to fight.

Now if we can strengthen the Government forces now and get into the wet season, then I believe the opportunity to negotiate will be infinitely better, certainly better than if the Government forces are routed and the rebels take over and do what they want to do in other communities where they have that kind of opportunity.

4. Effect of Dengue

Q. The question is raised by many of our policies in Southeast Asia and the United States government, they don't accept your ideology. We don't accept their ideology. On the other hand, we have to recognize that this is a very important question. But, I think their impact will be significant on the Congress as well as in the country.

5. Cambodia Stability

Q. Mr. President, you said, sir, if the funds are provided that hopefully they can hold out. How long can they hold out? In other words, how long do you feel this aid will be necessary to continue?

A. Well, this aid that we've requested on an emergency basis from the Congress is anticipated to provide the necessary humanitarian effort and the necessary military effort to get them through the critical period, roughly the latter part of June or first of July.