

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 would 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. Goods 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 end 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 violence but, on the contrary, subjects the innocents to new horrors.

We cannot meet humanitarian needs unless we provide some military assistance. Only through a combination of humanitarian endeavors and military aid do we have a chance to stop the fighting in that country in such a way as to end the bloodshed.

The second issue is whether the problems of Indochina will be settled by conquest or by negotiations. Both the Governments of Cambodia and the United States have made vigorous and continued efforts over the last few years to bring about a cease-fire and a political settlement.

1973 Cease-Fire

The Cambodian Government declared a unilateral cease-fire and called for negotiations immediately after the peace accords of January, 1973. It has since repeatedly expressed its willingness to be flexible in seeking the negotiated end to the conflict.

Its leaders have made clear that they are willing to do whatever they can do to bring peace to the country. The United States has backed these peace efforts. Yesterday we made public an outline of our unceasing efforts over the years including six separate initiatives since I became President. Let me assure you, we will support any negotiations and accept any outcome that the parties themselves will agree to.

As far as the United States is concerned, the personalities involved will not themselves constitute obstacles of any kind to a settlement. Yet all of our efforts have been rebuffed. Peace in Cambodia has not been prevented by our failure to offer reasonable solutions. The aggressor believes that it can win its objectives on the battlefield.

This belief will be encouraged if we cut off assistance to our friends.

We want an end to the killing and a negotiated settlement. But there is no hope of success unless the Congress acts quickly to provide the necessary means for Cambodia to survive.

If we abandon our allies, we will be saying to all the world that war pays. Aggression will not stop, rather it will increase.

In Cambodia the aggressors will have shown that if negotiations are resisted, the United States will weary, abandon its friends and force will prevail.

Reliability Involved

The third issue is the reliability of the United States. If we cease to help our friends in Indochina, we will have violated their trust that we would help them with arms, with food and with supplies so long as they remain determined to fight for their own freedom. We will have been false to ourselves, to our word and to our friends. No one should think for a moment that we can walk away from that without a deep sense of shame. This is not a question of involvement or re-involvement in Indochina; we have ended our involvement. All American forces have come home. They will not go back.

Time is short. There are two things the United States can do to affect the outcome. For my part I will continue to seek a negotiated settlement. I ask the Congress to do its part by providing the assistance required to make such a settlement possible. Time is running out.

QUESTIONS

1. Assurances on Cambodia

Q. Mr. President, you would—time is running out in Cambodia. 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 it comes quickly—I would say within the next 10 days or two weeks—it will be possible to get the necessary aid to Cambodia, both economic assistance, humanitarian assistance and 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 then there will be an opportunity for the kind of negotiation which I think offers the best hope for a peace in Cambodia.

2. Colby Briefing on C.I.A.

Q. Mr. President, would you tell us what Director Colby has told you of any C.I.A. connections involving, any C.I.A. connection with the assassination of foreign leaders?

A. I'm not in a position to give you any factual account. I have had a full report from Mr. Colby on the operations that have been alluded to in the news media in the last week or so, really involving such actions that might have taken place beginning back in the 1960's. I don't think it's appropriate for me at this time to go any further. We do have an investigation of the C.I.A., of our intelligence agencies, by the Congress, both overt and covert, going back from the inception of the C.I.A. and of course we do have the Rockefeller commission going into any C.I.A. activities in the domestic front.

But for me to comment beyond that, I think, would be inappropriate at this time.

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 the case, sir, can you explain why there 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 believe there is a growing concern which has been accentuated since we have seen the horror stories on television in recent weeks. The wanton use of rockets in the city of Phnom Penh, the children lying stricken on the streets and people under great stress and strain—bloody scenes of the worst kind—I think this kind of depicting of a tragedy there has aroused American concern, and I think it's a growing concern as the prospect of tragedy of this kind becomes even more evident.

So I have noticed in the last week in the United States Congress in a bipartisan way a great deal more interest in trying to find an answer, and yesterday I spent an hour plus with members of Congress who came back from a trip to Cambodia and South Vietnam and they saw first hand the kind of killing, the kind of bloodshed and it had a severe impact on these members of Congress, some of whom have been very, very strongly opposed to our involvement in the past in Vietnam, and I think their impact will be significant on the Congress as well as in the country.

4. Effect of Détente

Q. The question is raised by many critics of our policy in Southeast Asia as to why we can conduct a policy of détente with the two Communist super powers in the world and could not follow a policy of détente should Cambodia and South Vietnam go Communist. Could you explain that to us?

A. I think you have to understand the difference that we have with China—People's Republic of China—and with the Soviet Union. We don't accept their ideology. We don't accept their philosophy. On the other hand, we have to recognize that both countries have power bases in the world—not only in population, but in the regions in which they exist.

Now, we don't expect to recognize or to believe in their philosophy. But it is important for us, the United States, to try and remove any of the obstacles that keep us from working together to solve some of the problems that exist throughout the world—including Indochina.

Now the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China have supplied and are supplying military assistance to South Vietnam and Cambodia. We have to work with them to try and get an answer in that part of the world; but at the same time, I think that effort can be increased and the prospects improved if we continue the détente between ourselves and both of those powers.

5. 'Continuing a Bloodbath'

Q. Mr. President, putting it bluntly, wouldn't we just be continuing a bloodbath that already exists in Cambodia if we voted the \$222-million?

A. I don't think so, because the prospects are that with the kind of military assistance and economic and humanitarian aid we're proposing, the Government forces hopefully can hold out. Now, if we don't the prospects are almost certain that Phnom Penh will be overrun and we know from previous experiences that the overrunning of a community or an area results in murder and the bloodshed that comes when they pick up and sort out 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 were overrun. It's an unbelievable horror story and if we can hold out—and I think the prospects are encouraging—then I think we will avoid that kind of massacre and innocent murdering of people who really don't deserve that kind of treatment.

Q. If I may follow up, as I understand it, the Administration's point is that if we vote the aid that we'll have the possibility of a negotiated settlement, not a bloodbath. Is that correct? A. That is correct, sir.

Q. And yet just yesterday you indicated in your statement the State Department listed at least six unsuccessful efforts to negotiate an end to the war in Cambodia dating to the summer of 1973 when American bombing stopped there. The Cambodian Government was certainly stronger then, than it would be with just conceivably another \$220-million.

A. Well, I think if you look at that long list of bonafide legitimate negotiated efforts, the best prospects came when the enemies felt that it would be better off 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 or Khmer Rouge take over and do what they'd done in other communities where they've had this kind of opportunity.

6. Cambodian Stability

Q. Mr. President, you said, sir, that if the funds are provided that hopefully they can hold out. How long are you talking about. 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 dry season, which ends roughly the latter part of June or first of July.