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N E W S C O N F E R E N C E

#217

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:50 A.M. EDT

MAY 14, 1975

WEDNESDAY

Q Before you begin with the announcements, can you confirm the AP bulletin that just found that U.S. airplanes have attacked three Cambodian vessels?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot, Phil. I expect Joe Laitin will be having an announcement at the Pentagon sometime in the near future.

Q What do you mean, you can't. Do you mean you won't or that you don't know? Let me ask you that question.

MR. NESSEN: I can't.

Q What does "can't" mean? That is subject to various interpretations. At least I interpret it several ways.

MR. NESSEN: What are the choices?

Q The choices are --

Q You told us today the President had not made any final decisions. Has he made a decision in the last two hours or the hours since you talked with us?

MR. NESSEN: I said that Joe Laitin will have some announcements to make shortly.

Q Will you have it during the course of this briefing? If he does, why could we not listen to it?

Q Can we tell our offices that?

MR. NESSEN: I would like to do this in an orderly way, if I could.

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Q Ron, you, in effect, have confirmed it.

MR. NESSEN: I don't intend to confirm it, Jim.

Q You said that Laitin will have an announcement.

MR. NESSEN: I said Joe Laitin will have an announcement.

Q Have you all made an agreement that you are not to announce it, but that he is? Is that it, what you said?

MR. NESSEN: I would like to go on and skip the procedure.

Q When you say that Joe will have an announcement, that reply was in response to a question about reports of military action, correct?

MR. NESSEN: Phil pointed out to me an AP bulletin.

Q Yes, indeed, and this is your reply, so can we take it the announcement deals with possible military action?

MR. NESSEN: I certainly would not, Ralph. Enough mistakes were made on this story yesterday by people who made assumptions and so forth. I think maybe it would be a good time not to do that.

Q Can we tell our offices that Joe Laitin is going to respond?

MR. NESSEN: Don't you have a reporter at the Pentagon?

Q I don't know.

MR. NESSEN: We will adjourn for five minutes.

Q We cannot be at both of them, Ron. Will you please pipe it in here from the Pentagon?

MR. NESSEN: I will check.

(AT 11:52 A.M. EDT)

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12 NOON EDT

MR. NESSEN: We are going to go on with the briefing now.

Phil, you know how to break up a briefing.
(Laughter)

The President met with staff members this morning, as he usually does.

At 10:15 the President went over to the Theater in the Residence of the White House to greet a group of Michigan businessmen who are here for an annual visit to Washington. This group began coming to Washington under the auspices of Senator Griffin and the President, when he was Minority leader of the House, and Vice President. They meet with Senator Griffin and the President meets with them annually.

Q What cities? All cities?

MR. NESSEN: All cities of Michigan. They are here today to receive a series of briefings by Frank Zarb, Alan Greenspan and Bill Seidman, and to express their views as businessmen to the Administration.

We will have for you, after the meeting between the President and Prime Minister Den Uyl, a report on that meeting.

This evening, the President will host a working dinner in the Prime Minister's honor at 7:30. There will be coverage of the arrival for the dinner, and also at the beginning of the dinner.

Q Will that be a stag affair?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen the guest list yet. Sheila Weidenfeld will have the guest list.

The toasts will be piped back here. We will post the pools and the details later.

Q You mean this is a dinner we can cover?

MR. NESSEN: The arrivals and the beginning of the dinner.

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Tomorrow morning, there will be a State arrival ceremony on the South Grounds for the Shah of Iran at 10:30. There will be open coverage of that and of the exchange of remarks between the President and the Shah. A meeting between the President and the Shah will follow that and, of course, photographs will be available at the beginning of the meeting.

Tomorrow evening, at 8 o'clock, there will be a white tie State dinner in honor of the Shah and the Empress. We will have full details posted later, but let me mention ahead of time that those who are going in to cover the toasts -- camera crews and photographers and so forth -- will have to wear a white tie for that photo coverage.

Q Why is it white tie?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q It is not every day you have a Shah.

MR. NESSEN: That is a good answer.

Q Ron, in connection with this, will they allow this loudspeaker to keep shouting loudly that the Shah is a U.S. puppet? It is right across the street.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't know that.

Q I heard it as I came in, and I just wondered, is that allowed?

Q Will it be piped into the State Dining Room? (Laughter)

Q Ron, why don't you go on with your briefing?

MR. NESSEN: Just to look ahead to the weekend, I have a bit on Sunday.

As you know, the President is going to Philadelphia. Check-in time at Andrews is at 10 a.m. The press plane leaves at 10:30 and arrives in Philadelphia at 11:15.

The President will leave the White House at 10:55. He will leave Andrews at 11:15, and he will arrive in Philadelphia at 11:50.

The President will attend a luncheon at the University of Pennsylvania, which will be attended by faculty and wives and the honorary degree recipients.

The President is receiving an honorary Doctor of Laws degree. The President will attend the commencement which begins at 2:15. He will receive his degree at 3:15 and he will speak at 3:20.

For cameramen, the location of the camera platform is between 70 and 80 feet from the stage, so you should think about what kind of lens you want to take.

The location of the commencement is the Philadelphia Civic Center.

After the commencement, the President will drop in at a reception in honor of Senator Scott. It is given at the Marriott Motor Hotel on City Line Avenue in Philadelphia, beginning at 4:30. It is sponsored by, I guess you would describe it as a Jewish organization which encourages Jews to adhere to the moral, ethical and religious teaching of the Torah. It is the Lubavitcher Center.

They are naming a library for Senator Scott. That is the reason for the reception. The President will drop in on it, as I say.

Q What airport does he go to?

MR. NESSEN: There is only one airport in Philadelphia, the International.

Q Are you planning an embargo time for the speech?

MR. NESSEN: The commencement speech is at 3:20. I think we had better go ahead and make it for release on delivery.

Q Do you have a subject?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have a subject

Q Would it be available here at the White House before we leave?

MR. NESSEN: I would hope we could get this out maybe on Saturday afternoon.

Q That would be great.

MR. NESSEN: I would hope so.

Q Does the pool have to wear a cap and gown?
(Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: They have to wear yarmulkes.

The President is accepting the resignation of James L. Mitchell as Under Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. We will have some papers on these.

The President expressed his deep personal appreciation to Mr. Mitchell for his service at HUD. You may know that Mr. Mitchell is becoming Associate Director of the Office of Management and Budget for Natural Resources, Energy and Science, coming here in June, and the President expressed his gratitude that Mr. Mitchell is remaining in the Administration.

The President is acknowledging the retirement of Stephen S. Chandler as United States District Judge for the Western District of Oklahoma.

The President is transmitting to Congress the First Annual Report of the National Council on Educational Research. We will have copies in the Press Office, and you will have, or do have, a copy of the letter of transmittal.

Now, the surprise of the day: Preliminary work has started on the construction of the White House swimming pool.

Q Oh my. You mean we talk about swimming pools when you have a war on your hands? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: The pool will be slightly larger than the one the Fords had at their home in Alexandria. It will be built on the South Lawn just south of the West Wing.

Q What size is that?

MR. NESSEN: I am getting to all of that.

The contractor will be the National Construction Company, Inc., the same contractor which built the President's pool on Crown View Drive in Alexandria.

Q Of where, do you know, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Washington.

The cost is estimated at \$52,417.

Q Is this an outdoor pool?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, with an additional \$9,000 for landscaping.

Q Who pays it?

MR. NESSEN: The funds will be raised through private donations. The President has laid down very strict guidelines for these donations, the most important of which is that no Federal funds will be used in any way. The other guidelines for donations are that the maximum donation permitted is \$1,000 per person.

Donations of equipment or services will be limited to \$1,000 in value at the wholesale cost.

Q What is that again?

MR. NESSEN: Donations of services and equipment as opposed to money will also be limited to \$1,000 at wholesale value.

No donations from any corporation or union will be accepted.

A committee has been established to supervise the receipt and collection of the public contributions. The chairman is A. J. Sehorn, of Hayward, California, Vice Chairman of the Olympic Swimming Committee.

The treasurer is William J. Schuiling, a Washington banker.

Q What is his bank, Ron?

Q He is a Washington banker?

MR. NESSEN: Washington, D. C. He is a former classmate of the President at South High in Grand Rapids, and has been a friend of the President's ever since. I understand that he is the Chairman of a company called Financial General Shareholders, Inc, a holding company for the First National Bank of Washington.

Q How is the work starting now?

MR. NESSEN: Wait a minute. You would not believe the amount of detail I have.

Q If you wanted to make a contribution, who would you see?

MR. NESSEN: I assume you have to check with the committee that does this.

The measurements of the swimming pool are 22 feet wide and 54.83 feet long. I don't have the depth. Larry, that is one thing you forgot.

MR. SPEAKES: It varies.

Q That is not Olympic size, is it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so. Here is a breakdown on the cost. Excavation, \$2,500 --

Q Spare us this, will you?

Q I would like to know, did the President make this decision on his own? Why, at this time, when he has had all these budget problems does he consider spending the kind of money whether it is his or not?

Q Ron, will it be a heated pool?

MR. NESSEN: There will be a heater, yes, a 54 kilowatt heater.

Q Will it be covered?

MR. NESSEN: It will not be covered.

Q How is he going to swim in the winter?

Q That is quite an energy draw, Ron. We have people out in the Western part of the country who cannot irrigate farms because so many people in California are heating pools.

MR. NESSEN: Some of the equipment is being moved in today, as you noticed. I think some construction fences will be goind up. The contract calls for the work to begin on or about May 15th, which is tomorrow, and to be concluded by July 1st. In answer to Helen's question --

Q Ron, was this put out for bids?

MR. NESSEN: It was not put out for bids. As I say, this company is the one that built the President's pool in Alexandria. There are no Federal funds involved, so there is no requirement for bids. Gordon Rudd, the President of this company, is also a friend of the President's.

Q Can you give us the costs, as you started to give us?

MR. NESSEN: Surely. The excavation --

Q Excuse me. Did he have to get permission from this commission to put it on the White House grounds?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. That is called the Fine Arts Commission, and it was approved by the Fine Arts Commission.

Q You have not said where it will be.

MR. NESSEN: Just south of the West Wing. If you go out there, you can see the construction stakes, I think.

Q Ron, how much money has been collected already?

Q Why was this a secret?

MR. NESSEN: This was actually not a secret, Helen. You know that the President has been at least thinking about this ever since he came into office, and the project was put aside for awhile.

Q Why?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. It took a little time to work out all the details.

Q Will the taxpayers pay for this heating every month?

MR. NESSEN; The cost of running the heater whenever it is running, I have not actually gotten.

Q Ron, can you answer my question? How much money has already been collected? Is it all collected already?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is not all collected already. Some donations have already come into the White House in the total amount of \$1,000. In addition, other contributions have been mailed to various people all earmarked for this project and the White House -- a group called the White House Swimming Pool Committee -- was kind of an outfit that formed itself, I think, has checks for about \$5,000. The Swimming Pool Institute, which is a trade association of swimming pool makers --

Q I am sorry, I didn't hear that.

MR. NESSEN: Swimming pool -- what is the conflicting briefing going on over there?

Q Somebody is on the telephone.

Q You know that is not permitted during briefings.

MR. NESSEN: Where is Bill Roberts?

Q We have never had a telephone in here before. We have never had a telephone ringing in here before.

MR. NESSEN: Could we hold down the --

Q I told him not to ring his phone any more.

MR. NESSEN: Fine. (Laughter)

Now, what was the question?

The Swimming Pool Institute has received checks totaling about \$4,000, so you have a total of \$10,000.

Q May we have the names of all the contributors?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have them. It is not a White House fund-raising, but you should get it.

Q Well, it certainly is a White House fund-raising and it certainly is something that the American public should have.

MR. NESSEN: I think you should get in touch with --

Q If it were not a White House deal, you would not be announcing it today.

Q Could we get back to the briefing?

Q When did the President make the decision on this?

MR. NESSEN: Now, Helen asked why did he decide to go ahead with the swimming pool in the light of --

Q In light of the budget and the belt-tightening.

MR. NESSEN: Let me offer some thoughts on that, and I am sure you all have your own thoughts on that.

This is not an elaborate swimming pool. It is maybe a shade larger than the kind of pools that people do have in their backyards here and elsewhere in the country. It is certainly not a plush swimming pool.

The President is a swimming enthusiast. He enjoys it and it is good for his health. Dr. Lukash, I believe, has spoken publicly of the benefits of swimming for the President's health.

Federal money will not be spent in this project. Federal money is spent, of course, in the protection of the President's safety and one of the considerations was that it is seen that some money could be spent from private donations for the protection of the President's health.

The pool does not obviously belong to President Ford. It belongs to the White House and it will be used by future Presidents and their families and guests.

There was a previous swimming pool here, as you know, right below where we are standing. It was also built by public donations for Franklin Roosevelt, also for health reasons.

The idea for the project came from people who are enthusiasts of swimming and the benefits from it. Again, it is not Federal money. I suppose you could look at it one way by saying that it is a good sign that he intends to stick around for another four years.

I made that part up. (Laughter)

Q Maybe public criticism will curtail the future.

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Q The \$9,000 landscaping. Will that be Government funds or will that be part of the private thing, too?

MR. NESSEN: Part of the private. There is a separate contract. I mean, the contract with National Construction is the \$52,417 I mentioned. Then there will be a separate contract for \$9,000, which has not been let, but it will also come out of the contribution.

Q When did the President make the final decision to go ahead with this?

MR. NESSEN: About a week ago, Ted.

Q Ron, how much did the President's pool at his home in Alexandria cost?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I heard him mention the figure one time, but I forget what it is.

Q Was it \$20,000?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, no, it was not that high.

Q This pool cost what, \$52,000?

MR. NESSEN: \$52,417.

Q Do you know if this swimming pool is paid off? Does he still owe money on that swimming pool in Alexandria?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Will this committee solicit funds, Ron, for the leftover \$42,000? How are they going to raise the \$42,000?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what their plans are, as far as soliciting goes. You will just have to get in touch with those two people and find out.

Q Is this square, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I think a rectangular shape would probably be more accurate.

Q On another subject, has the President made his decision yet on the New York financing situation?

MR. NESSEN: I would expect that on the question of the New York financial troubles, it will be late afternoon to early evening at best. I think there is a good chance that it will be tomorrow morning.

Q That sort of slops over beyond the 24-hour deadline, which Mayor Beame was talking about yesterday.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Why is it taking so long?

MR. NESSEN: He just wants to weigh what they told him yesterday.

Q Has the ship's seizure interfered with his decision on the New York situation?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, does the President plan to see Congressional leaders this afternoon for any reason?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of that.

Q Is he going to inform them of the bombing?

MR. NESSEN: Has he?

Q That is what I would like to know. Has he?

Q What about the first question? What about the Congressional leaders?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of a meeting with Congressional leaders.

Q Who did he talk with or meet with or discuss this situation with last night?

MR. NESSEN: The President has not, as far as I know, talked directly to leaders, other than I think we mentioned a few days ago that in the course of early in the week -- I think Monday it was -- that he had been seeing or talking to Scott and Anderson on another matter. He gave them sort of a factual fill-in, and then I think Congressman Rhodes was in on another matter.

The leaders of Congress have been consulted on the progress of this incident, by the Congressional Liaison Office.

Q Did he consult Congress before taking any action? Did he consult with the leaders before this action took place?

MR. NESSEN: What action, Peter?

Q The one that we spent five minutes trying to catch up on from the Pentagon.

MR. NESSEN: I would rather not answer the question in that form. I will say that the White House has consulted with leaders of Congress.

Q The form of the action is what I mean.

MR. NESSEN: What action, Peter?

Q The bombing of Cambodian warships.

MR. NESSEN: I think I will have to leave it the way it is at the moment.

Q That is a discrepancy in the account, Ron. Were you prepared to straighten it out? Was this bombing of the Cambodian warships prompted by the planes being fired upon, or not?

MR. NESSEN: Peter, I have not seen an announcement of any bombing of Cambodian warships, which somewhat hampers this conversation.

Q Ron, we are even more hampered because we don't know what happened and we are trying to find out if the President consulted with Congressional leaders about taking military action. You know what military action was taken, and we don't. How can we arrive at some information in this kind of a situation? End of question.

MR. NESSEN: The question was, how can we arrive at --

Q How can we arrive at the information that we are supposed to tell the American people when we are getting stonewalled here?

MR. NESSEN: No, you are not getting stonewalled, Ted. I said that Joe Laitin was expected to have an announcement in the near future, and I think we are somewhat hampered in going beyond that until Joe has made his announcement.

Q Why did the President decree that Joe Laitin would make the announcement that ordinarily would come from the President?

MR. NESSEN: Well --

Q Joe Laitin is not Commander-in-Chief.

MR. NESSEN: Well, it is, as you know, the --

Q Wait a minute, now. (Laughter)

Q Wait a minute, Sarah.

MR. NESSEN: He didn't mention that to me.

We are in a difficult position here for a time, but let me say something about Sarah's question.

The Pentagon and the State Department and the White House, this Administration, are all -- you know, I think a feeling has grown up somehow that they are separate entities and that the Pentagon goes off its own way and the State Department goes off its own way and that whenever I refer you to there for information, we are somehow --

Q The question still stands, Ron. Would you answer it?

MR. NESSEN: I would like to finish making a point.

Q Yes, please answer it.

MR. NESSEN: I would like to make a point, if I may.

The Pentagon carries out the President's military policy. The State Department carries out the President's diplomatic policy. They gather information for him in their areas, so these are not separate entities. These people work for the President, carry out policy for the President, so if Joe Laitin makes an announcement, he is making an announcement for this Government. It is not some sovereign State over in the Pentagon, it is this Government, so it really does not make any difference.

Q The point is that this is potentially a very grave situation. I think the American people -- certainly, we, too -- expect the White House to have something to say about it. It is as simple as that.

MR. NESSEN: I understand.

Q Ron, is the President trying to divorce himself --

Q Just a minute, Jim. Let him answer my question.

MR. NESSEN: Joe has made his announcement. Would you like to hear what it is?

Q Yes.

Q Are you going to run this off for us?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q In other words, Ron, are we to understand this is not the President, this is Joe Laitin, right?

MR. NESSEN: This is the Defense Department statement.

"Beginning at 8:30 p.m. EDT yesterday, there were indications that the Cambodians appeared to be attempting to move U.S. captive crewmen from the ship to the mainland. After giving warning, U.S. aircraft began efforts to block this movement.

"Three Cambodian patrol craft were destroyed and about four others were damaged and immobilized. One boat succeeded in reaching Kompong Som.

"U.S. aircraft had been receiving small arms fire from such boats for several hours prior to this action.

"The MAYAGUEZ is still anchored off Koh Tang Island. The first U.S. Navy vessel, the destroyer U.S.S. HOLT is now in the area."

That was the announcement by the Defense Department.

Q Ron, what about the crew members of the freighter? Is there any word on them?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q The statement indicates that the crew is still aboard and someone is trying to get them off.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any information to give you on that.

Q Did the President give the order for this firing as Commander-in-Chief?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything beyond the statement, Helen.

Q Why can't you say if the President consulted with Members of Congress before he ordered that action?

MR. NESSEN: He did consult with Members of Congress before he ordered that action.

Q He did order that action, then?

MR. NESSEN: Well --

Q Who were the Members of Congress?

MR. NESSEN: The Chairman and the ranking Republican on the Senate and House Armed Services, Foreign Relations or International Affairs, whichever they call it in the House, and Appropriations; the Speaker and the President Pro Tem of the Senate, and the Republican and Democratic leaders of the Senate and House.

Q When?

MR. NESSEN: Between 5:30 and 6 o'clock last night, Eastern Time.

Q By phone or what?

MR. NESSEN: By telephone.

Q Were they sworn to secrecy about this?

Q This was after the fact, though, was it not?

MR. NESSEN: No, it was about three hours before the fact.

Q Does the President --

MR. NESSEN: Just a moment. I want to try to answer a question about being sworn to secrecy.

Q Was that by telephone, Ron, that consultation?

MR. NESSEN: They were consulted by telephone.

Q By the President?

MR. NESSEN: Just a second. Let me clear up some of these questions.

Sarah, the answer is yes, the President ordered the military action. The phone calls were by the Congressional liaison staff, which is the normal procedure. They were told at that time that the information they were being given was classified.

Q Does the consultation entail approval or just notification?

MR. NESSEN: It is difficult to answer that question. The President did this because he wants to keep Congress informed, as he did at the time of the Cambodian and Vietnamese evacuations.

Q People are leaving the briefing.

MR. NESSEN: They really should not.

Q They should not.

MR. NESSEN: Mr. Roberts --

Q Now, I was rebuked on this for filing the baseball pass.

Ron, bring those people back.

MR. NESSEN: Bill Roberts is going to get them.

Q Go ahead, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: They were informed because the President believes in keeping them informed and because the Congress has expressed a desire to be informed, and this was done consistent with that idea as expressed in the War Powers Act.

Q It says, "shall consult with," does it not? You read it yesterday.

MR. NESSEN: That was consultation.

Q Under what powers did he act?

MR. NESSEN: The President has the authority to protect the lives of Americans and the property of Americans from acts of aggression under the Constitution.

Q I am not clear whether this attack was because they were trying to prevent the Cambodians from taking the American sailors to the mainland or whether it was done in retaliation.

MR. NESSEN: No, it said, "The U.S. aircraft began efforts to block this movement."

Q Could you explain how they were trying to block them?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't understand your question.

Q Can you explain how the aircraft was trying to block them?

MR. NESSEN: I can't really go beyond the statement, Jim.

Q Just to follow that, did the President have any reason to believe that some of the MAYAGUEZ crewmen may have been on either the boats that were destroyed, damaged or the one that made it to Kompong Som?

MR. NESSEN: I can't go beyond the statement.

Q I want to go back to my question. Did the President get approval in this process?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't listen in on the phone calls, so I don't know what the reaction was.

Q This is so terribly important.

Q For the future.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that there is -- well, are you asking just out of curiosity or are you asking whether there was some law that requires approval?

Q I am really asking you this: Does the President feel that merely notification is all that is necessary under the law?

MR. NESSEN: This was considered to be consultation.

Q But, Ron, it was made by the White House liaison staff; surely they are not consulting with these leaders. They were, were they not, just simply informing them of the action?

MR. NESSEN: They were keeping them informed and consulting with them.

Q Did they ask their approval?

Q In light of the seriousness of this question, could you find out for us exactly what message was given to the Congressional leaders?

MR. NESSEN: I know what message was given to them.

Q What was that?

MR. NESSEN: They were told that they were being called to inform them of certain developments.

Q Specifically what? Were they given several options that the Government might follow?

MR. NESSEN: I think for their reaction to this you really need to talk to them.

Q Do you know if the leaders approved or --

Q Let's see if we can get an answer to this.

MR. NESSEN: Basically, what they were informed of was briefly to bring them up to date on where the ship was and on the original statement put out demanding the release of the crew and the ship and then to tell them that the President had ordered that these Cambodian vessels, if they tried, would be prevented from going to the mainland and that if there was any attempt to move to the mainland, that the President had directed that U.S. aircraft attempt to stop the movement.

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Q Ron, was there any Congressional dissent expressed in those telephone calls, that you know of?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q Did the President speak with anybody else on the Hill, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of.

Q Ron, an effort was made to block the ships. Is there any effort being made or plan to rescue the American seamen?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot talk about that.

Q Following on my other question, if I may, please --

MR. NESSEN: Yes?

Q -- really, isn't this information given by the President to these Congressional leaders after the fact?

MR. NESSEN: No, it was given at 5:30.

Q I mean, as you say, the President gave this information. It seems to me that he is telling them, this is the situation and this is what I have ordered to be done, period. He is not asking is it okay, is he?

MR. NESSEN: It is considered consultation.

Q Ron, there is a difference. Did he ask their approval or did he tell them what was happening? This is for the future now, when they come and criticize it, or anything else.

MR. NESSEN: I understand.

As I say, this is considered to be keeping Congress informed and consulting with Congress.

Q Who considers it to be consultation? Is that a legal opinion from the White House Counsel's Office?

MR. NESSEN: That is the White House opinion.

Q Can you pin down when the action occurred?

MR. NESSEN: Joe Laitin's statement says, beginning at 8:30 p.m., Eastern Time.

Q Yesterday?

MR. NESSEN: Yesterday.

Q Ron, what are the HOLT's orders, the HOLT's instructions? Is it similarly to try to prevent --

MR. NESSEN: If I could just stop for a minute, Jim, Bud and some others.

After the information was given to the Members who were phoned, their comments were written down and transmitted to the President. The reason I didn't know that during the first round of questions here was that Jack has been checking and has now brought me this.

So, these comments were written down by the Members and were passed on to the President. It was not possible for the President to talk to all the Members but their views were transmitted to him.

Q Can you tell us what hour the President --

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen the comments, Ted, frankly.

Q Can you find out whether there was a consensus?

MR. NESSEN: We can make that effort.

Q Ron, what about Senator Goldwater's statement this morning that he had heard that they have got Americans onshore?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything for you on that, Les.

Q Ron, you said it was not possible for the President to talk to all the Members. Did he talk to some of these people by telephone personally?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware in this particular consultation that he took a personal part in it.

Q Ron, what hour did he order the firing to begin if they tried to move the men? Could you tell us that, please?

MR. NESSEN: I can't, Saul. I don't have it, for that matter.

Q Ron, you are leaving the impression that there are troops on Cambodia in answer to Les' question.

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry. You had better run that past me again, Les, if I left that impression.

Q I just asked about Senator Goldwater's statement this morning that he had heard from an Admiral, I believe, in the Pacific Fleet, that part of that American crew has been taken ashore.

MR. NESSEN: He heard that the crew of the ship had been taken to the Cambodian mainland?

Q Part of it. That is what I understand.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to give you on that, but from that, I would certainly not leap to any conclusion that there are crewmen on the shore.

Q Ron, at the present time, is the ship just there with no gunboats around it, it is there by itself now, right?

MR. NESSEN: I frankly don't know whether there are still gunboats around it or not.

Q What are the orders, as I asked before, to the HOLT? Does it have similar instructions to try to prevent the movement of crew members to the mainland or does it have additional instructions beyond that? What can you tell us?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the orders to the HOLT, Jim.

Q Can you tell us what is the Commander-in-Chief's response to the Thai's order to get the American Marines -- over 1,100 of them -- out of Thailand? I know we were referred to the State Department earlier and we were told they would have a statement. I called the State Department and they said they didn't have anything yet, they would call me back. They never did.

MR. NESSEN: I think what they would have told you, if you had been able to make contact with them, is that we are in diplomatic contact with the Thai government.

Q Ron, on this question of an attempt to block the Cambodian vessel, were we attempting to block them before they got to the MAYGUEZ to offload personnel or after they got personnel on it?

MR. NESSEN: You are taking the word "block" out of the statement, "U.S. aircraft began efforts to block this movement"?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: The movement referred to is in the first sentence, "to move U.S. captive crewmen from the ship to the mainland."

Q Ron, are we then proceeding on the assumption that some of these crewmen were on board those patrol vessels that were later damaged or destroyed?

MR. NESSEN: There were indications of that, yes.

Q That they were aboard?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q On board?

MR. NESSEN: That the Cambodians appeared to be attempting to move --

Q Had they been transferred from the ship to the gunboat?

Q To the island?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything on that.

Q So, are we to destroy these men in order to save them?

Q Is it conceivable, Ron, that we would have fired on those knowing that there are Americans aboard them?

MR. NESSEN: I just can't go beyond the statement, Steve.

Q You are leaving it that way.

MORE

MR. NESSEN: Peter?

Q You have left a serious impression here --

MR. NESSEN: Tell me what it is.

Q -- that the American seamen were aboard these gunboats that were blown up.

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I did leave that impression.

Q You did.

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to leave that impression, and you should not leave here with that impression.

Q In answer to Bill Theis, you said that they were aboard.

Q Do we proceed on the assumption that some of those crewmen, at least, were on these patrol vessels that were later destroyed or damaged?

MR. NESSEN: And I did indicate.

Is somebody telephoning? Bill? Where is Bill?

Q This is ridiculous.

MR. NESSEN: Another poacher.

I understand the point, Bill and Peter, and I don't know how to quite do this within the bounds of what I can say, but I don't want you to get the impression that we know that there were any American crewmen on those Cambodian ships. May I leave it at that?

Q No. Let's pursue that a little bit. Do you know if all the American crewmen are safe right now, or don't you?

MR. NESSEN: I just can't really go beyond the statement.

Q You don't know?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't say I don't know. I said I can't go beyond the statement.

Q What was that statement, exactly, please?

MR. NESSEN: I am reading you the Defense Department statement. You don't want that read again, do you?

Q Ron, is all of this press conference being broadcast to two or three other countries already?

MR. NESSEN: This one?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q I would be surprised if it hasn't.

Q Ron, is there a state of war between the two countries at this moment, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q What is the President doing to prevent a wider war? Has he assured the Russians and Chinese and so forth that this is a limited engagement? You know, there is always the possibility of an expansion of a war position right now.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything on that.

Q Ron, have diplomatic efforts been exhausted? That is the phrase Dr. Kissinger used last night, that we would not take military action until diplomatic efforts were exhausted. Have they been?

MR. NESSEN: Like Dr. Kissinger, I am not going to talk about diplomatic efforts.

Q Ron, is the President going to speak to the American people on television today or by any other means?

MR. NESSEN: There are no plans.

Q No plans.

Q Ron, can we go back to that other question just a moment?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q The Pentagon statement says that the action took place when the Cambodians appeared to be attempting to move U.S. captives to the mainland. Now, does that not in fact mean that action --

MR. NESSEN: Let me answer your question and also let me, if I may, make a philosophical point; that is, that as I started out here much earlier saying that there were a good number of bum stories yesterday based on assumptions and adding two and two together to get five and so forth, and I would hope that in this particular situation --

Q If you don't want us to write bum stories and make bum assumptions, Ron, why don't you give us some information and why don't you answer some questions?

Q Would you clear up the situation as regards the Marines? You have not done that.

MR. NESSEN: I have said to those who have --

Q What happened to the Marines? How many went? Who came back if they went?

MR. NESSEN: Have we got everybody not filing, for one thing?

Q People using telephones through the window, under the table.

MR. NESSEN: I want to answer several unanswered questions here.

Sarah's question on Marines, I am not able to talk about any possible troop movements.

Dick's question, does not the statement imply or can you not infer -- and that is what I am trying to urge people not to do. The fact is, Jim, I am simply not able to go beyond the statement, but I just urge you strongly not to assume that there were American crewmen on those ships.

Q That was not my question.

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry.

Q My question was, were you not assuming at the time that there were Americans going beyond those?

MR. NESSEN: Dick, I am not going to go beyond the statement.

Q Ron --

MR. NESSEN: I want to answer some other questions.

Q Ron, can you tell us whether the crewmen are alive or not?

Q Does the White House know whether the crewmen are safe?

MR. NESSEN: I am not able to answer that question.

Q Ron, have you people told any other country more than you have told the American people today?

MR. NESSEN: I just frankly don't have that information, Sarah.

Q Ron, one more question.

MR. NESSEN: This will help you. The Congressional liaison office reports that there was what they refer to as a strong consensus of support, and also that strong consensus of support and no objections.

Q No objections.

MR. NESSEN: No objections.

Q Did you say the Chinese were informed of this military action?

MR. NESSEN: I don't recall ever saying that.

Q Will you give us a list of all those men contacted by the liaison office?

MR. NESSEN: I gave it to you, Sarah.

Q I mean a written-out list. You lumped it with leaders. You had a lumping there of leaders.

MR. NESSEN: If you want to get it out of the Congressional Directory or --

Q No, we have that. I think you ought to give us a list.

Q The Defense statement said that at 8:30 p.m. they took some actions that indicated they were moving out.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Is there any reason why you cannot tell us the status of the crew?

Q I am in the middle of a question here.

Q Is there any reason why you cannot tell us the status of the crew?

MR. NESSEN: No, I cannot give you the reason.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:50 P.M. EDT)

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 8:30 P.M. EDT

MAY 14, 1975

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: I want to give just a little house-keeping information here at the beginning. If we could hold off on the cameras for a minute?

I know and understand your interest in more news on the situation regarding the ship. I have got to ask your understanding of the fact that at this moment I cannot tell you one single thing beyond what we have already told you. As I say, I know your interest, and I have just got to ask you to be patient about this.

We have passed out to you the text of a letter --

Q Just a second. We would like to know if the President is aware of the Radio Cambodia report that they are going to release the ship?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q He is aware?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Did he learn it from the news copy?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q How did he learn it?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, I begged your indulgence on this.

Q I didn't know that was the line. Is that where the line is drawn, you cannot say how he got the information?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Does he have an official report that the Cambodians have said this? This is very important.

MR. NESSEN: Ralph, I understand and I sympathize, but I cannot answer any questions.

Q When will you be able to?

MR. NESSEN: I do not have a moment when I can forecast that I will be able to answer your question.

Q But you are saying that he received a report independent of UPI's bulletin that Phnom Penh is saying that the ship will be released?

MR. NESSEN: The President knows of the report that -- of the report that -- the Cambodian radio has said it will release the ship.

Q Can you just answer whether any military action that may have been contemplated has been suspended as a result of the report?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot answer that question.

Q Do you know about the crew, Ron? They said the ship will be released.

MR. NESSEN: I can't answer any questions.

Q Did he know about that report, Ron, before briefing the Members of Congress?

MR. NESSEN: I can't answer any questions, Jim.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 8:36 P.M. EDT)

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 9:15 P.M. EDT

MAY 14, 1975

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: I am going to read you two statements. I am going to give you a little bit of background material, and I think you are going to run and file and we won't answer any questions at this point.

Q When we come back, you will answer questions?

MR. NESSEN: Let's get yourselves filed first and then we will talk about it.

First of all, I want to read you a statement.

Q By whom? By you or the President?

MR. NESSEN: By the Press Secretary.

"In further pursuit of our efforts to obtain the release" --

Q Would you read it slow, please?

MR. NESSEN: I will tell you what. I frankly think I would like to read these straight on and let you file.

Q We can't file unless we get the words.

MR. NESSEN: Look, what I have to say, there is some urgency about it.

"In further pursuit of our efforts to obtain the release of the SS MAYAGUEZ and its crew, the President has directed the following military measures, starting this evening Washington time:

"U.S. Marines to board the SS MAYAGUEZ; U. S. Marines to land on Koh Tang Island in order to rescue any crew members who may be on the island; aircraft from the carrier CORAL SEA to undertake associated military operations in the area in order to protect, and support the operations to regain the vessel and members of the crew."

Now, that is the end of that statement.

Q Ron --

MR. NESSEN: Now just a moment.

We have now, since that statement was prepared -- and we will have copies made for you -- sent the following urgent message to the Cambodian authorities.

Before you ask, I cannot tell you the method.

The message is this: "We have heard a radio broadcast that you are prepared to release the SS MAYAGUEZ. We welcome this development, if true. As you know, we have seized the ship."

MORE

Q What?

MR. NESSEN: This is a message to the Cambodians from the United States and it includes the line, "As you know, we have seized the ship."

Q "We," the U.S.?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

"As soon as you issue a statement that you are prepared to release the crew members you hold unconditionally and immediately, we will promptly cease military operations."

I want to give you one bit of news ON BACKGROUND, if we will all agree on that.

Q Is this signed by the President?

MR. NESSEN: Let's turn the cameras off, please.

Q Who signed that message?

MR. NESSEN: From the United States Government.

For your own BACKGROUND, we don't know if the route by which we are sending this message is sufficiently fast. Therefore, we believe that news channels may be the fastest way for this message to get through.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

(AT 9:19 P.M. EDT)

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:31 P.M. EDT

MAY 14, 1975

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President will be down to talk to you in 15 or 20 minutes. He will have a statement. Without questions to the President, I think I can probably come in after the President and answer your questions.

Q Can we go live with the President?

MR. NESSEN: It is available for live broadcast. The network cameras should move inside.

Q In this room?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Is that all you have to say?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Will the statement be in printed form?

MR. NESSEN: We will probably have to get you an as delivered.

Q I am sorry, Ron, you said you would answer questions after the President?

MR. NESSEN: Not immediately after, but I will give you a chance to file on his statement.

Q He will not answer questions?

MR. NESSEN: No, he will not.

Q Are you prepared with his chronology?

MR. NESSEN: I just about have it together.

END (AT 11:33 P.M. EDT)