

2/16/68 8

I see where General Westmoreland may be named a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I have never discussed that with General Westmoreland for one second.

So far as I am concerned, if there is any way General Westmoreland could go, it would be up. Right now, he has the most important assignment I know of, and I am going to try to help him. I hope I am helping him by making it clear -- repeat, clear -- loud and clear -- that every person that I know of who deals with General Westmoreland has great respect and confidence in him.

QUESTION: Mr. President, could you address yourself, please, sir, to the gossip and rumors about nuclear weapons in Vietnam?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the Press Secretary covered that very well.

The President must make the decision to deploy nuclear weapons. It is one of the most awesome and grave decisions any President could be called upon to make.

It is reasonably apparent and known to all that it is very much against the national interest to carry on discussions about deployment of nuclear weapons; so much so that the Act, itself, tries to guard against that.

I have been in the Executive Branch of the Government for seven years. I think I have been aware of the recommendations made by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, by the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense during that period.

So far as I am aware, they have at no time ever considered or made a recommendation in any respect to the employment of nuclear weapons. They are on our planes on training missions from time to time.

We do have problems. There are plans with our allies concerning what they do.

There is always a person available to me who has full information in connection with their deployment, as you newspapermen know. I think if any serious consideration were ever given, and God forbid there ever will be, I don't think you would get it by some anonymous caller to some committee of the Congress. I think most of you know that, or ought to know that.

No recommendation has been made to me. Beyond that, I think we ought to put an end to that discussion.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you see any new, hopeful prospects for negotiating with Hanoi?

THE PRESIDENT: We look for them every day.

I would like to be able to say yes. In the last few days, preparatory to closing out the statement that Secretary Rusk issued yesterday, I believe, or the day before, we reviewed Hanoi's actions in response to more than 20-odd proposals made by well-intentioned and interested people.

MORE