

# Transcript

Following is a transcript of President Ford's broadcast news conference from San Diego yesterday afternoon, as recorded by The New York Times:

## OPENING STATEMENT

Will you please sit down.

At the outset, let me express my appreciation to Mayor Pete Wilson and the fine people of San Diego for the very warm welcome.

I also am delighted to see one or more of my former colleagues in the Congress here. It's always nice to see them and Al and others who may be here. Good morning.

I have a short opening statement. We are seeing a great humanitarian tragedy as untold numbers of Vietnamese flee the North Vietnamese onslaught.

The United States has been doing and will continue to do its utmost to assist these people.

I have directed that all available naval ships stand off Indochina to do whatever is necessary to assist. We have appealed to the United Nations to use its moral influence to permit these innocent people to leave and we call on North Vietnam to permit the movement of refugees to the area of their choice.

While I've been in California I have been spending many hours on the refugee problem and our humanitarian efforts. I have directed that money from a \$2-million special foreign aid children's fund be made available to fly 2,000 South Vietnamese orphans to the United States as soon as possible. I've also directed American officials in Saigon to act immediately to cut red tape and other bureaucratic obstacles preventing these children from coming to the United States.

I have directed that C-5A aircraft and other aircraft especially equipped to care for these orphans during the flight be sent to Saigon. I expect these flights to begin within the next 36 to 48 hours.

These orphans will be flown to Travis Air Force Base in California and other bases on the West Coast and cared for in those locations. These 2,000 Vietnamese orphans are all in the process of being adopted by American families. This is the least we can do and we will do much, much more.

The first question from Mr. George Dissinger of the San Diego Tribune.

## QUESTIONS

Q. Mr. President, are you ready to accept a Communist takeover of South Vietnam and Cambodia?

A. I would hope that that would not take place in either case. My whole Congressional life in recent years was aimed at avoiding it. My complete efforts as President of the United States were aimed at avoiding that. I am an optimist, despite the sad and tragic events that we see unfolding. I will do my utmost in the future, as I have in the past, to avoid that result.

## 2. Military Aid for Vietnam

Q. Mr. President, I understand you're soon going to ask Congress for new authority to extend humanitarian aid in Southeast Asia. I wondered if you stand by your request though for more military aid for South Vietnam.

A. We do intend to ask for more humanitarian aid. I should point out that the Administration request for \$135-million for humanitarian aid in South Vietnam was unfortunately reduced to \$55-million by Congressional action.

Obviously we will ask for more—the precise amount we have not yet determined. We will continue to push for the \$300-million that we have asked for, and Congress had authorized, for military assistance to South Vietnam, and the possibility exists that we may ask for more.

## 3. The Will to Resist

Q. Mr. President, how and why did the United States miscalculate the intentions, the will of the South Vietnamese to resist?

A. I don't believe that we miscalculated the will of the South Vietnamese to carry on their fight for their own freedom. There were several situations that developed that I think got beyond the control of the Vietnamese people. The unilateral military decision to withdraw created a chaotic situation in Vietnam that appears to have brought about tremendous disorganization.

I believe that the will of the South Vietnamese people to fight for their freedom is best evidenced by the fact that they are fleeing from the North Vietnamese and that clearly is an indication they don't want to live under the kind of government that exists in North Vietnam. The will of the South Vietnamese people, I think, still exists. They want freedom under a different kind of government than has existed in North Vietnam. The problem is how to organize that will under the traumatic experiences of the present.

Q. A unilateral decision by whom?

A. It was a unilateral decision by President Thieu to order a withdrawal from the broad exposed areas that were under the control of the South Vietnamese military.

## 4. Paris Peace Accords

Q. Mr. President. A. Miss Thomas.

Q. What is your response to the South Vietnamese Ambassador to Washington's statement that we had not lived up to the Paris peace accords and that the Communists are safer allies?

A. I won't comment on his statement. I will say this, that the North Vietnamese repeatedly and in massive effort violated the Paris peace accord. They sent North Vietnamese regular forces into South Vietnam in massive numbers—I think around 150 to 175,000 well-trained North Vietnamese regular forces in violation of the Paris peace accord moved into South Vietnam.

We have objected to that violation. I still believe that the United States in this case and in other cases, is

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a reliable ally. And although I'm saddened by the events that we've read about and seen, it's a tragedy unbelievable in its ramifications.

I must say that I am frustrated by the action of the Congress in not responding to some of the requests both for economic and humanitarian and military assistance in South Viet-

nam and I'm frustrated by the limitations that were placed on the chief executive over the last two years.

But let me add very strongly I am convinced that this country is going to continue its leadership. We will stand by our allies and I specifically warn any adversary they should not under any circumstances feel that the tragedy of Vietnam is an indication that the American people have lost their will or their desire to stand up for freedom any place in the world.

We read in European papers to the effect that Western Europe ought to have some questions. Let me say to our Western European allies: We're going to stand behind our commitments to NATO and we're going to stand behind our commitments to other allies around the world. But there has to be in the minds of some people a feeling that maybe the tragedy of Indochina might affect our relations with their country. I repeat, the United States is going to continue its leadership and stand by its allies.

Q. Mr. President. Can you explain why President Thieu without close military ties as allies did not tell you what he was going to do in terms of the retreat? A. I think the only answer to that can come from President Thieu.

## 5. Threat to U.S. Security

Q. Mr. Ford. Recently you said the fall of Cambodia could threaten the national security of this country. Considering the probable fall of South Vietnam to Communist forces, do you feel that will threaten our national security and if so, how?

A. At the moment I do not anticipate the fall of South Vietnam, and I greatly respect and admire the tremendous fight that the government and the people of Cambodia are putting up against the insurgents who are trying to take over Cambodia. I believe that in any case where the United States doesn't live up to its moral or treaty obligations, it can't help but have an adverse impact on other allies we have around the world.

Q. Are you, in fact, a believer of the domino theory—if Southeast Asia falls then perhaps some of the other countries in the Pacific are next?

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A. I believe that there is a great deal of credibility to the domino theory. I hope it doesn't happen, I hope that other countries in Southeast Asia—Thailand, the Philippines—don't misread the will of the American people and the leadership of this country into believing that we're going to abandon our position in Southeast Asia. We are not.

But I do know from the things I read and the messages that I hear that some of them do get uneasy. I hope and trust they believe me when I say we're going to stand by our allies.

### 6. Americans in Saigon

Q. Mr. President, as you are well aware, there are about 7,000 Americans still in Saigon. They are in danger not only from Communist attack, but from South Vietnamese reprisals. There are reports the South Vietnamese are in a bad temper toward Americans. Do you feel that under the War Powers Act and also under the limitations voted by Congress in 1973 on combat by Americans in Indochina that you could send troops in to protect those Americans, and would you if it came to that?

A. I can assure you that I will abide totally with the War Powers Act that was enacted by the Congress several years ago. At the same time, I likewise assure you that we have contingency plans to meet all problems involving evacuation if that should become necessary. At this point I do not believe that I should answer specifically how those contingency plans might be carried out.

Q. Sir, you don't want to talk specifically. Can you tell us however if you do believe that you do have the authority to send in troops. You're not saying, I understand, whether you would, but do you have the authority?

A. It's my interpretation of that legislation that a President has certain limited authority to protect American lives and to that extent I will use that law.

### 7. Red Tape and Orphans

Q. Mr. President, despite your statement here this morning about war there apparently is a lot of red tape in

Washington. A San Diego man is trying to get four Vietnamese children out of that country. He has received hundreds of calls from people all over the Western United States wanting to help, even adopt, children. But despite this outpouring of compassion by the American people all he gets from Washington is "No way." There's nothing that can be done. Why is he running into this problem if we're trying to help?

A. Having had some experience in the past with Federal bureaucracy when we had a similar problem involving Korean orphans, I understand the frustration and the problems. But I am assured that all bureaucratic red tape is being eliminated to the maximum degree and that we will make a total effort, as I indicated in my Opening Statement, to see to it that South

Vietnamese war orphans are brought to the United States.

Q. Do you think something can be done before it's too late for many of them?

A. I can only say we'll do what has to be done, what can be done as a practical matter. I can't guarantee that every single South Vietnamese war orphan will get here but I can assure you that we intend to do everything possible in that humanitarian effort.

### 9. Resignation of Thieu

Q. Mr. President, if it would alleviate the refugee problem in South Vietnam and bring about something of a temporary cease-fire, would you urge President Thieu to resign?

A. I don't believe that it's my prerogative to tell the head of state elected by the people to leave office. I don't believe whether it's one head of state or another makes any difference in our efforts to help in the humanitarian program.

We're going to carry it on. I hope with the full cooperation of the South Vietnamese Government and I don't think it appropriate for me to ask him under these circumstances to resign and I don't think his resignation would have any significance on our humanitarian efforts.

### 10. Vietnamese Refugees

Q. In that regard, are there any plans under way by the United States Government to accept large numbers of Vietnamese refugees in this country other than the 2,000 orphans that you've talked about?

A. Well, under existing law, action by the Attorney General can permit refugees who are fleeing problems in their own country to come to the United States. This authority was used after World War II. This authority was used after the Hungarian invasion by the Soviet Union, this authority has used on a number of other occasions. I can assure you that that authority is being examined and if it will be helpful, I certainly will approve it.

### 14. Curbs on War Powers Act

Q. Mr. President, you spoke a few minutes ago about being frustrated by the limitations of the War Powers Act.

If it were not forbidden now, would you like to send American planes and naval forces, and possibly ground forces, into Vietnam to try to turn the situation around?

A. I have said that there are no plans whatsoever for U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. On the other hand, I think history does prove that if a chief executive has a potential, it to some extent is a deterrent against aggressors.

Q. So that is your frustration, because you do not have that power to at least threaten the possibility? A. I didn't use the word "threaten." I said the potential, for power I think over the years has indicated that that potential is a deterrent against aggression by one country against another.

### 17. The Lesson of Vietnam

Q. Mr. President, some people are saying this week that despite all our massive aid in Vietnam and all the lives that were lost there, that the whole thing has come to nothing. Now how do you feel about this and do you think there's any lesson to be learned in what's been happening over there?

A. I believe that the program of the previous four or five Presidents—President Kennedy, President Johnson, President Nixon and myself—were aimed in the right direction. That we should help those people who are willing to fight for freedom for themselves. That was a sound policy.

Unfortunately, events that were beyond our control as a country have made it appear that that policy was wrong. I still believe that policy was right if the United States had carried it out as we promised to do at the time of the Paris peace accords, where we promised with the signing of the Paris peace accords that we would make military hardware available to the South Vietnamese Government on a replacement, one-for-one basis.

Unfortunately we did not carry out that promise.

### 18. The Role of Congress

Q. Are you blaming Congress for this then?

A. I am not assessing the blame on anyone. The facts are that in fiscal year 1974 there was a substantial reduction made by the Congress in the amounts of military equipment requested for South Vietnam.

In fiscal year 1975, the current fiscal year, the Administration asked for \$1,400-billion in military assistance for South Vietnam. Congress put a ceiling of \$1-billion on it and actually appropriated only \$700-million.

Those are the facts. I think it's up to the American people to pass judg-

## 20. World Situation

Q. Good afternoon, Mr. President.

A. Good afternoon.

Q. In a speech you're going to deliver here in San Diego this afternoon you warn against fatalism, despair and the prophets of doom, and yet as I look back over the past eight months or a year—I don't mean to suggest that these are any way your responsibility or fault—I have a laundry list which cites Portugal as having a Leftist government raising serious questions about its future in NATO; Greece and Turkey are at each other's throat threatening the southern flank of that alliance. We're familiar that Secretary Kissinger's mission failed in peace talks with Egypt and Israel, and we don't need to rehash the situation in Cambodia and South Vietnam.

That being the case, sir, how can you say that the world outlook, and particularly as you address it in your speech next week on the State of the World is anything but bleak for the United States when many of the minuses which I cited are actually pluses for the Soviets?

A. The speech that I'm giving to Congress and to the American people next week will deal with many of the problems that you have raised.

I think we do face a crisis, but I am optimistic that if the Congress joins with me and if the American people support the Congress and me as President we can overcome those difficulties. We can play a constructive role in Portugal, not interfering with their internal decisions, but Portugal is an important ally in Western Europe. We can find ways to solve the problem in Cyprus and hopefully keep both Greece and Turkey strong and viable members of NATO.

We can, despite the difficulties that transpired in the Middle East in the last several weeks, find a way to keep a peace movement moving in that very volatile area. It may mean—it probably does—that we will have to take the problem to Geneva. I would have preferred it otherwise. But the facts are that if Congress, the American people and the President work together—and I expect they will—then in my judgment those disappointments can become pluses.

Q. But sir, can you cite any specific reasons for the optimism you expressed?

A. The historical character of the American people. That's the main ingredient. It is my judgment it will take American from the disappointments of the present to the optimism of the future.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

ment on who was at fault, or where the blame may rest. That's a current judgment. I think historians in the future will write who was to blame in this tragic situation, but the American people ought to know the facts, and the facts are as I've indicated.

I think it's a great tragedy, what we're seeing in Vietnam today. I think it could have been avoided. But I'm not going to point a finger, the American people will make that judgment. I think it's more important for me and the American people—and the Congress—in the weeks and months ahead to do what we can to work together to meet the problems of the future.

And that's what I intend to do and I'll go more than halfway with the Congress in seeking to achieve that result. I think we have the capability in America, I think we have the will to overcome what appears to be a disaster in Southeast Asia. To the extent that I can, I hope to give that leadership.

## 19. 55,000 American Lives

Q. Mr. President. Regardless of what caused it, it seems apparent that for the first time in our nation's history the enemy is about to win a war where Americans fought and died. Do you think that those 55,000 lives were wasted?

A. I don't think they were wasted providing the United States had carried out the solemn commitments that were made in Paris at the time American fighting was stopped in South Vietnam, at a time when the agreement provided that all of our troops should be withdrawn, that all of our P.O.W's should be returned. If we had carried out the commitments that were made at that time, the tragic sacrifices that were made by many—those who were killed, those who were wounded—would not have been in vain. But when I see us not carrying through, then it raises a quite different question.

Q. Is that a yes, then, sir? A. I still think there's an opportunity to salvage the situation in Vietnam, and if we salvage it giving the South Vietnamese an opportunity to fight for their freedom, which I think they are anxious to do if given an honest opportunity, then there is, there was not, a sacrifice that was inappropriate or unwise.