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TRANSCRIPT OF BRIEFING BY STEPHEN LEDOGAR
THURSDAY, MAY 4, 1972, 3:08 P.M. o'clock

MR. LEDOGAR: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen

I think you will recall that in his statement two weeks ago, President Nixon said about his decision to have us return to the negotiating table: "We are not resuming the Paris Talks simply in order to hear more empty propaganda and bombast from the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong Delegates, but to get on with the constructive business of making peace."

You will also recall that in his statement last week, Ambassador Porter said: "In the light of the situation created by your invasion of South Viet-Nam it will not be practical to hold meetings if you ^{refuse to} continue to deal with the substance of the present invasion and general problems of peace, including prisoners of war and those missing in action. Only substance will keep us at this table."

Now this morning, as you can see from your statements, we got from the communist side propaganda and bombast. We got, certainly, not one single word

of substance.

Nevertheless, in the afternoon, we tried again, in our speech, which was prepared mostly during the lunch break, to ask specific questions, to try again to elicit from the other side some sort of reply that might get us to at least address a matter of substance - one single matter of substance.

Their additional remarks, and all of them, were nothing but sterile propaganda and bombast,

And you heard Ambassador Porter's characterization and his report that Ambassador Lam informed the other side that under the circumstances we were not prepared to agree to a date for the next meeting unless events showed some change in their attitude, or indicated that they were prepared to negotiate seriously.

And then Ambassador Porter, when it was his turn, he said the following:

"Your statements today, once again, regrettably consisted of sterile denunciations, arrogant ultimatums and clumsy evasions.

"Let ^{it} be recorded that it is impossible to induce you to discuss particular subjects bearing on a peaceful settlement. That truth is as clear as

your military aggression in South Viet-Nam. We therefore, see no grounds for a meeting next week. We will resume the plenaries whenever you indicate that you are seriously interested in the negotiation of matters of substance; or when we believe discussions would be useful. You are obviously not ready to negotiate now any more than in the past." Unquote

I'll try to be responsive to all your questions except those on secret talks.

Q Steve, when Mr. Porter left, he said the decision to suspend ^{the meetings at Kleber} represents a complete lack of progress in every available channel. Well, Mr. Le ^{currently} Duc Tho is/an available channel in Paris. Could you please tell us when contacts were made with Mr. Le Duc Tho on the American side, and who in fact saw him on behalf of the American contingent?

A No, I will not answer that question. That's one of the ones I will not answer.

You will notice, those of you who were there, that Ambassador Porter very carefully chose his words and I'm not going to add in any way, or explain in any way those words.

Q We'll have to come back to this same point. Can we assume that the "all available channels" includes secret talks?

A I recognize that I'm here before a bunch of professionals. We know each other, we've been with each other for three years.

It is the decision of the President of the United States that it is in the best interests of the people of the United States, to not talk about "secret talks." I'm going to carry out that decision.

Q Well, but that is fine for you to respect that, but the Ambassador, Ambassador Porter seems not to be following his President's orders.

A Yes, he is following the President's orders.

Q Come on, let's stop beating around the bush -- we --

A There's no "beating around the bush." This is a carefully chosen phrase, and there it is. You're not going to get any elaboration on it. ~~Now~~ If you want to make this transcript long, you can just go right ahead, but it's going to be a waste of everybody's time.

Are there any questions about what happened today?

Q Are "all available channels" still open?

Can you answer that?

A No comment.

Q I want to ask you: Would you have any objection to conducting the conference in English, since I think everybody does speak English? I mean, some people speak English, or at least have some sort of simultaneous translation, while you are conducting the conference? Why not make the conference a television program -- instead of making the announcements afterwards why can't everybody hear what you record during the conference -- can't it be made public?

A Well, you get most of it. But maybe that's not a bad idea. However, at present, it's not the procedure we agreed on.

Q Well, is it possible to have it on television -- the conference.

A You take that up with the representatives of the other side, I think it would be very educating

And interesting if you, and all of you, could be in the room and have to go through what we go through.

[Laughter.]

Q You really hate us, don't you, [Laughter.]

Q Were those questions put by Mr. Porter today, still open for answers?

A Yes, there was no answer to any of them.

Q But Xuan Thuy has charged that you have not answered their question.

A Yes, his question was: "When are you going to cease your aggression, and when are you going to cease your support for Nguyen Van Thieu?"

Q Well, have you answered it?

A Yes, we have answered it at practically every meeting. All you have to do is read what the President said.

Q In other words -- excuse me -- having the conference televised --

A Would you please take that up with the representatives of the other side? I have already

given you our view on it.

Q Yes.

Q Steve, I wonder if you could comment on the reference made by Xuan Thuy in his statement

To the final protocol of the Geneva Conferences to the effect that there is no international border between North and South Viet-Nam?

A Yes, It should be viewed in the light of his statement that North Viet Nam is a sovereign and independent country, ^{in the light of} and other quotations from that same document specifically the following, which I will recite from memory: "Neither zone, neither the Northern Zone nor the Southern Zone, shall be used as a base for aggression against the other."

Q I think your memory is wrong on that.

Q It relates to the 17th Parallel.

Q I think you have misquoted.

A I don't have the document here, but I'll stand on my statement.

Q You do know the 17th Parallel, do you know it?

A Yes, I know it very well.

I know that there are presently nine North Vietnamese divisions south of the 17th Parallel.

Do you know that? Do you know that?

Q Yes, I know that

A Do you know what your trouble is? You are tending to put the aggressor, which is North Viet-Nam on the same ground as those who are the victims of aggression, namely the South Vietnamese people.

Q And the North, where the Bombers are, what is your

A Are there any serious questions from people seeking information?

Q Do you know about the bombers?

A Or will there be more heckling? Is there more heckling or do any of the professionals want information?

Q Steye, this thing that Ambassador Porter said toward the end of this last statement: "... or whenever we decide that discussions would be useful."

What does it mean? Are there any other circumstances other than the other side proposing a specific subject for conversation, that would lead the United States to decide the discussions would be useful?

A Yes, if we ^{simply} believe the discussions would be useful. In other words, we are leaving all the doors open. We don't want to get into the business, such as we had last month, of you asking me "What would be a typical sign that you would consider was an indication of a change in attitude?"

Q You mentioned "doors" just now and I missed the phrase. Can I assume the doors are half open, half closed, ajar, or open -- or whatnot? [Laughter.]

A We are eagerly awaiting a sign that there might be a change in their attitude and they might, for the first time, be interested in serious negotiations.

Q And they do the same for you.

Q Ambassador Porter's third question:

"Are you prepared to discuss a combination of this approach with that of an overall political settlement, as proposed in our side's eight points of January 25?"

You said that you didn't get any answers at all.

But in Madame Binh's statement, she quite clearly ^{eight} turns down the/points and deals with her first two points in a page and a half in her statement in defense of it.

And at one point she says about one of the points, "This is an absurd demand," To me, that's a reply,

A I don't relate the two exactly.

There are just certain subjects that have to be addressed here. -- If there is ever going to be a negotiated resolution to this conflict -- and one of them is the political future of South Viet-Nam.

Another is the military problem, including prisoners of war.

And what we are asking here is, even aside from anybody's plan: Are you prepared to, on the one hand, either deal with the military question alone as was proposed in the private talks on May 11, 1971; or, on the other hand, will you relate, as the wording of the question goes,

If you won't do that -- if you insist that the political problem must be part of the overall package, will you relate the two? Now that's a simple, straight-forward question to which the answer was in effect: "When will you surrender?"

Q Mr. Ledogar, is the American offer of cease-fire still open?

A All the proposals that we have made are still on the table. None of them are set forth on a "take-it-or-leave-it" basis. They are all there for negotiation.

Q Would you be willing to set a date for withdrawal?

A We went through that last time, Madame. I don't think that you read the documents if you are returning to that question.

Q Within a month?

A You and I had a long discussion of this six weeks ago.

Q Can I ask you a question about Ambassador Porter's seventh question? "Will you discuss a mutual return to the circumstances that surrounded the cessation of acts of force against the DRV in 1968? Does that mean that Ambassador Porter wants to resume the situation there or that he would like the North Vietnam^{now} explicitly to renew what was a tacit agreement in 1968?"

A No, we are not asking them to do anything

more than they did then --just to resume the
situation.

Q It's not a request for a public statement?

A No, we are willing to uphold our end of
the deal -- part of which was that we would
agree that they were going to pretend publicly there was no
deal. The point is: Can we return to the
deal? We don't want to change the conditions.

Q Not necessarily a public statement.

A No.

Q Thank you.

[Ended at 3:25.]