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TRANSCRIPT OF A NEWS CONFERENCE BY SECRETARY ROGERS
WASHINGTON, D. C., WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 20, 1969

(Question) Mr. Secretary, do you have a statement?

(Secretary Rogers) No, I don't have a statement. I just want to welcome you to State Department West. I hope you like this room better than -- you know, I actually preferred the other room. But I know how the press preferred this room. I think you prefer this room.

(Question) It is nearer the phones, Mr. Secretary.

(The Secretary) Anyway, I solved the problem by the time-honored diplomatic device of capitulation.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, at your most recent press conference here in Washington early in July you took note of the lull in battlefield activity in Vietnam. At that time you said it was too early to tell whether this had any political significance. Since that time the lull has continued, although activity has flared up and down from time to time.

My question is do you find any political significance in it, have you since that time, do you now? And in that connection, how about significance in Paris?

In other words, are we getting any closer to peace?

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AMERICAN EMBASSY - TOKYO

(The Secretary) Well, in answer to the question about whether the lull has any political significance or not, I think that I would have to say that it cannot be determined now. There was a while that it looked as if it might have some significance. But I think the events of August 11 and 12 which resulted, as you know, in very intense enemy activity, made it very difficult to say that the lull had any political significance.

So, we are disappointed at the activity on August 11 and 12, and we had hoped that the enemy was continuing to pursue less intense offensive activity in Vietnam.

I think, though, that I do want to say that since then, since August 11 and 12, the activity is back to what it was prior to that time. And although we cannot be sure that it has any political significance, we do not want to put too much emphasis on the activity of those days because, as you know, the President listed three criteria that he was going to use to determine the future troop replacements: one was the level of activity of the enemy, two was the ability of the South Vietnamese to take over the combat responsibilities, and three were the negotiations in Paris.

Now, in so far as the level of activity is concerned, over the last nine weeks it has been relatively low. We recognize that -- I think all of us recognize that war itself has grave risks. And we are willing to take sensible risks for peace.

So in deciding what to do in terms of troop replacements in the future, the President and all of us are going to keep those considerations in mind.

We are prepared to take sensible risks for peace.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, does the lull in actuality have any effect on the President's immediate decisions to make a further announcement of troop replacements this month?

(The Secretary) Yes, it will be taken into consideration by the President. Secretary Laird and I will see the President from time to time the remainder of the month, and the President intends to make a decision before the month is up.

We will take into consideration the offensive activity of the enemy for the last two months. We will obviously have to consider the activity of August 11 and 12.

But as I say, on the whole the enemy activity, the offensive activity of the enemy, has been somewhat less these last two months than previously.

I think I should also point out that the infiltration that I referred to in my last press conference is still down. It is considerably down.

So that would indicate that although the enemy may have the ability to launch offensive actions as he did August 11 and 12, he might have more difficulty in launching a sustained offensive action.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, is it a fair conclusion from what you have said that the United States has done nothing in response to this lull, whatever its political meaning may be?

(Mr. Secretary) No, I haven't said anything to suggest that at all.

(Question) What have we done?

(The Secretary) What I have indicated is that we are taking what we think are sensible risks for peace. And we are going to proceed with a program of troop replacement with that basic principle in mind.

Now, in so far -- I gather what you are talking about, Mr. Roberts, is whether there has been a change of battle plans, orders. Is that what you have reference to?

(Question) Well, that is one of the things. Secretary Laird has mentioned the change there. But it has never been very clear as to whether in fact this is an official policy change by the Government.

(The Secretary) Well, I don't want to get into an extended discussion about military orders, except to say that the military activity on our part since -- well, certainly for the last couple of months, has been consistent with the President's speech on May 14, which is to Vietnamize the war to the fullest possible extent, to conduct our operations in a way to protect the American lives, and to take into consideration the activity of the enemy.

Now, this has occurred. And until August 11 and 12 the level of activity, as you know, was very low, casualty rates were down. So that the increase in activity is a result of the enemy's action.

(Question) What I am trying to get at, if I may pursue that -- following Mr. Hensley's question you said at that last press conference, if I remember correctly, that if after a couple of weeks' examination of the lull then beginning you would make some decision or the Government might make some decision in response. Now, are you saying that the lull continued only because of the Communist activity, level of activity, or decision, or that the United States also did something to lower the level of hostilities?

(The Secretary) I think that the United States did something to lower the level of activity.

(Question) What did we do?

(The Secretary) Well, we are not going to disclose, Mr. Roberts, all the orders in a war. And you understand why we can't do that. The fact is that the lull was partly because of the reaction of the United States, and the reason that the activity increased was because of the enemy's action.

Now, I am not going to get into military orders except to say we did respond and we are prepared to if the other side wants to.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, can you tell us what the prospects are at the moment on getting something from the Russians on SALT talks?

(The Secretary) Mr. Bailey, we have not heard from them. We have been somewhat surprised that we have not, because when I spoke originally to Mr. Dobrynin about our wishes to proceed in August he indicated some enthusiasm, was pleased that we had so indicated. But we have not heard from them since. They know that we are willing and would like to proceed with these talks.

I am informed that Mr. Dobrynin has been having some health problem, minor health problem. But I think he is expected to return to Washington in the near future.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, has the Sino-Soviet border conflict in any way interrupted your initiative towards Communist China for resumption of our Warsaw talks?

(The Secretary) No, not at all. We have indicated from the beginning of this Administration, and I repeated it in Canberra in a speech there at the Press Club, of our willingness to enter into these discussions with Communist China. I also indicated at that time that we would, at the

appropriate time, attempt through diplomatic channels to see if it was possible to get these talks resumed. At the appropriate time, when it seems the best opportunity to elicit a favorable response from the Communist Chinese, we will renew that offer.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, how do you appraise the situation in Laos?

(The Secretary) Well, since my last press conference there has not been a great deal of change. We have obviously felt that this was a matter of grave concern. We have discussed the matter with the Soviet Union and the U.K., who are co-chairmen of the Geneva Agreements. We think that Laos and Cambodia should be included in any settlement involving Vietnam. At the moment we are watching it very carefully.

John.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, there are some people who believe that the Soviets are not doing all that they can to help achieve an end to the fighting in Vietnam and Laos. Do you agree?

(The Secretary) Yes, I agree. I don't think they are doing as much as they could. I suppose they have a problem. At least they say they have a problem with their constituencies. They are supplying most of the military equipment for the North. And I suppose that if they were willing to and felt politically they could, they could be of greater help.

I have not detected recently any help at all on their part.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, could you give us the scenario for the evolution of the Administration's policy on Latin America? Where do we stand now on the new policy?

(The Secretary) Well, we talked to Governor Rockefeller who is working on his report, and I think when the President returns to Washington, Governor Rockefeller will make a report. We intend to discuss the matter with Latin American countries further, and we would hope that we can have some decisions in the next few months.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, we have been led to believe that the process of disengagement, withdrawal or replacement of American troops in Vietnam doesn't necessarily depend upon the enemy action, lulls or non-lulls.

(The Secretary) That is correct.

(Question) Is that correct?

(The Secretary) That is correct.

(Question) So we could continue the withdrawal whether there was a high level or a low level of enemy activity in Vietnam.

(The Secretary) Yes. Of course a high level of activity would make it less likely and make the troop replacement program more difficult. As I said, the President announced three criteria, and we will consider all of them in making the decision. But one of the most important factors in that decision is the ability of the South Vietnamese to handle the combat responsibilities in that area. And I must say that they have -- so far they have taken over the responsibilities very well and we are pleased with the developments up to this time.

(Question) My point is that all three criteria do not have to apply at the same time -- any one is applicable.

(The Secretary) That is correct.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, there has been some report here that you have a new front opening up on reorganizing the State Department. Is that true?

(The Secretary) I don't think we have a new front. We have pretty well completed our personnel changes. We have a few staffing problems left. But on the whole the Department, I think, so far as administration is concerned, is in good shape. We have, as I say -- Mr. Cargo's operation still has some people -- we have some places to fill. But on the whole I think it is well staffed. And I am very proud of the people we have. I think they are unusually capable.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, tomorrow is the first anniversary since the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. A year ago, Administration officials had quite a lot to say on that subject. Do you have anything to say on that subject today?

(The Secretary) Well, the anniversary of the military invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union and four of its allies is a reminder, a grim reminder, of the difficulty we face in entering an era of negotiation with the Soviet Union.

Certainly the American people are still firmly convinced that this was a profound tragedy, not only for the people of Czechoslovakia but for all people that believe in peace and security and justice. We believe, our people believe and our country believes, that all nations, large and small, have the right to pursue their own interests and aspirations. And no doctrine, whether it's the doctrine of limited sovereignty or any other doctrine, can interfere with that right.

So I think I can say that this anniversary serves as a grim reminder with ominous overtones of the difficulty that we have in trying to resolve some of these differences among nations by peaceful means.

And it does point up life as it is as distinguished from life as we wish it were.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, there seems to be some open disagreement now in the Administration on how to approach the question of a mutual test ban on MIRV. We have heard from the Pentagon, from Dr. Foster, and also from Dr. Nutter, in their testimony before the House Subcommittee, that they don't feel that our MIRV's and the Soviet MIRV's are appropriate trade-offs, while at the same time we have the release of a letter from Mr. Smith of the Arms Control Agency, in which he states his personal opinion to Senator Brooke that he felt that a MIRV test ban, a mutual MIRV test ban, should be given priority, and so on.

Can you tell us where you stand on this issue, and when we can get an Administration position on this?

(The Secretary) Yes. The President has said -- and I'll reiterate -- that we think this is a very important matter. And, although there may be slight differences of opinion, I don't think they are very serious in the Administration.

The President has announced that we are willing to consider some kind of a mutual moratorium on MIRV's if it's beneficial to both the Soviet Union and the United States.

Now, that is a matter that he has now under consideration and when the SALT talks start it will be one of the items that he will have to decide upon.

I think that we have talked to Senator Brooke on two or three occasions. We think that his proposal has been helpful, and we have it under consideration. We will give it full consideration.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, returning to Vietnam for a moment, would you define further what you mean by sensible risks to peace?

(The Secretary) No, I don't think I will. (Laughter)

(Question) Mr. Secretary, pursuing the SALT talks question for a minute, do you think there is a possibility --

(The Secretary) Excuse me. I don't mean to be flippant. But I don't think you can define what's sensible. It depends on the facts in the situation, and when we analyze them we recognize that -- in other words, if we were going to give, to guarantee everything, then I suppose we just maintain a status quo. I mean if we wanted to be sure that we took no chances at all.

Now, the President has decided on another policy. The policy is that we will proceed to Vietnamize the war. And in that process, there are certain risks that have to be taken, and we are prepared to take those risks as long as they are sensible.

What we do want to emphasize to the other side is that that does not indicate at all that we are going to be soft-headed about it. The President's policy, as announced on May 14th, is the policy of this Administration. And if they read it again, they will see that there is nothing in there that suggests that we are going to either take careless risks, be careless in taking risks, or that we are going to back away from our responsibilities.

On the other hand, we are going to proceed with the policy as he announced it.

Excuse me.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, is it possible, in your view, that the Soviet Union is backing away from the SALT talks because of our foot-dragging on the MIRV issue?

(The Secretary) No, I don't think so at all. I think that they probably -- and this is speculation -- they are probably preoccupied with a lot of things. The most important is the Sino-Soviet conflict. As you know, they have had their ambassadors back in Moscow for some time. And you also know that they have been acting in a way which is quite different than they have ever acted before.

They have gone to embassies all over Western Europe and this hemisphere presenting their case against the Chinese, which is really quite unusual. They have gone into West Germany, for example, and pleaded their case and pointed out that the Chinese are responsible and they aren't.

It's pretty clear that they are really preoccupied with the Chinese problem. They moved a lot of equipment toward the border. So I don't believe that it's that. And the word we get back through diplomatic sources is that they plan to let us know. But I think they have their problems.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, some of the Navy spokesmen believe that the Soviet Union is practicing sea power diplomacy. They have had a flotilla in the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico, and now they have got over 60 ships in the Mediterranean. Would you want to comment on that?

(The Secretary) Yes. Since 1967, in the Mediterranean, they have varied from having about 30 ships -- and I'm speaking of both combat and auxiliary ships -- to about 60. Recently, they have had really a high point, they have had about 63 vessels in there.

We have not noticed any correlation between their naval activity and political activity, as such. But we are watching it very closely and, as you know, NATO particularly has been observing this. And they are going to take any necessary action to be sure that the security of the area is not in any way impaired.

(Question) Mr. Secretary --

(The Secretary) Let me catch someone else, Urrey. I'll be back to you.

(Question) On the subject of the contingency agreement with Thailand, do you regard this as a common and standard type of agreement of this sort? Or do you regard it -- does it give you any concern?

(The Secretary) No, it doesn't give me any concern, and I think it has gotten sort of blown out of proportion. It's a contingent plan, and it's based on a lot of assumptions, just as all military planning is. And we have a good many of them. All nations have a lot of contingency military plans. Obviously, they can't be made public. If they were made public, they wouldn't be of any value.

Now, that is all this is. It was started in 1964, completed in 1965. It's an old plan. It's pursuant to the SEATO Treaty. It expressly provides that it cannot be operative, that it's just for planning purposes, and that it requires a mutual agreement and consent of both nations before it could ever become operative.

So I honestly don't see what the problem is. I have talked -- I have sent a long letter to Senator Fulbright. It's something that we haven't -- that we were not involved in, we are not responsible for. And we are perfectly willing to make it available for his inspection, and the inspection of the Committee. Two of the Senators have already seen it, and I understand Secretary Laird has extended an invitation and Senator Fulbright I think has accepted for lunch to discuss the matter. So I don't really believe it's a problem.

(Question) Then why was it necessary to enter into the agreement?

(The Secretary) It isn't an agreement. It's like all military plans, it's a contingency plan. And, as you know, the President of the United States, all of us in the Administration, say that it has no binding effect. It's a plan pursuant to the SEATO Treaty, just as we have plans pursuant to treaties all over. NATO has a lot of military planning, contingency planning. All nations do.

Now, that is all it is. And the President has agreed that it doesn't have any binding effect. The Prime Minister of Thailand has said so. The Foreign Minister announced yesterday that it had no binding effect.

Now, why we keep insisting that it somehow is binding, I don't understand. It isn't binding. It's a contingency plan. We are willing to let the Senator look at it, and it has no meaning beyond that.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, would it require action by Congress before it became effective?

(The Secretary) Well, before it gets to Congress, it would require action on the part of both Governments, just as if it hadn't existed. Any plan requires action on the part of both Governments. And whether you have one in existence or whether you took one up a week before trouble arises, it requires action on the part of both Governments.

Now --

(Question) What about Congress?

(The Secretary) Well, it depends, of course, on what was involved finally. As I say, this plan assumes a lot of things which obviously wouldn't all occur, just as all military planning does. I mean, the actual military situation never really fits into a plan completely.

Now, in terms -- I think what Congress probably is concerned about is the prospect that somehow we could be dragged into another land war in Thailand. And I have said to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee that we fully understand the necessity for support of any military venture, both by Congress and the public. If there is one thing that Vietnam has made clear, it's that.

Now, we will, to the full extent of our ability, get the advice of Congress, consult with them along the way, and in any appropriate circumstances we will get their consent.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, you said earlier that the United States did its part in contributing to the lull. Has that situation changed since the enemy resumed its activity, or are we still --

(The Secretary) No, it has not changed.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, in connection with Vietnam, what are the respects for what some people have called territorial accommodations where there are areas where the enemy has bases and strong, either support or control, of the population where we don't send our military forces and vice versa. Is that the situation on the ground in some areas now?

(The Secretary) Well, I wouldn't want to describe it quite that way, I think, on the broad question that you pose if the other side wanted to negotiate a political settlement, and they did have political strength in certain areas, I think that would be a factor we'd have to consider. But at the moment, I don't think it's under consideration.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, as head of the State Department, do you see any reasons for optimism in regard to the Nigerian war now in its second year?

(The Secretary) No, unfortunately, I don't. It's a tragic war. We applaud the efforts of so many people who have attempted to help, the latest

being the efforts of Pope Paul. The Chiefs of State of the Organization of African Unity are going to meet next month. All we can say is that we hope that some negotiated settlement could be worked out.

We have made, as you know, the largest contribution in terms of food and medicine. In other words, we have done more than our part in a humanitarian way. And we have urged others to attempt to help in resolving the problem. One of those problems that occur in foreign affairs and it's extremely difficult. I must say that I don't see any particular hope.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, Ambassador Lodge has returned to this country for consultation, at a time when it appears there is absolutely no progress of any sort in Paris and unless it is progress in circles. Why should he come back now for consultation?

(The Secretary) Well, I agree with you that there certainly has been very little progress in Paris. We always have hope that something may develop and we are constantly attempting to think of new approaches, new suggestions, new ways to discuss our common problems.

He is going to talk with the President and me in San Francisco tomorrow. We're going back to San Clemente and have further discussions about it, still hopeful that we can find some avenue that will lead to negotiations that will result in peace. So far we haven't found any willingness on the part of the other side to enter into meaningful discussions.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, you have said that we don't have any ground combat troops in Laos. But it is a fact known to everybody, even though not conceded by the last Administration or this one, that we are bombing in Laos, that we have Special Force units in Laos. What is our commitment to the Government of Laos.

(The Secretary) Well, we have, as I said a little earlier, under the Geneva Accords -- we have all pledged, and the nations who were involved pledged, the independence and neutrality of Laos. And our commitment is the same as other nations, and, that is, we hope that they will remain independent.

At the moment, there is the very serious threat of aggression by the North Vietnamese. We haven't any commitment beyond what you have just referred to. We do not have combat troops in Laos. We are quite concerned about the problem. But there hasn't been any particular deterioration since my last press conference.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, would you address yourself to the President's visit to Romania on two scores? One, has it complicated and hurt our relations with the Soviet Union? And number two, what about the reports that your people in the State Department didn't want the President to go to Romania?

(The Secretary) Well, let me talk about the latter part of your question first. I don't know where those reports emanated from. The President spoke to me about ten days before he decided to announce his trip to Romania, and I was enthusiastic about it. It was consistent with everything that I had said, if you go back and look at my statements about attempting to improve our relations with all countries, and whether they are in Eastern Europe or Communist China, I had indicated that we were willing to do that.

Now, I talked with the top people concerned with Romania in the Department, and they agreed with me. They all thought it was a fine idea. So I just don't know where the stories emanated from. It may well be that some of the subordinates in the State Department had some questions about it. And I think any one of these trips does involve pros and cons.

There are certain risks and advantages and disadvantages. And I don't think the fact that someone suggested that there might be some disadvantages is a really serious matter. I would hope that in all these cases that people in the Department will express their honest points of view. But I didn't detect any opposition to the trip. And certainly I was enthusiastic about it.

Now, the first part of your question, dealing with the result of the trip, I think that the result of the trip has been very good. I think it was most successful. I haven't -- there is no way of knowing whether it has affected the Soviet thinking or not. And, as I said in Australia, I don't think we can conduct our foreign policy based on whether it's going to make Communist China unhappy or the Soviet Union unhappy. We are going to try to improve our relations with all countries, including countries in Eastern Europe.

On the trip as a whole, I think that the trips that we took were extremely successful. And I think that our prestige in all the countries that I visited has never been higher. I didn't detect any opposition on the part of government officials, on the part of the public, on the part of the press or anywhere else, about our policies in Asia, with a single exception of some question raised in the Republic of China about our new policy toward -- in the Republic of China concerning our new policy toward Communist China, I didn't find any reservation about our policy. It met with enthusiastic response in all of these countries.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, along with this China policy, are you at all concerned that this may be at least making it a bit difficult for the Soviet Union to get around to talking on the SALT matter with us?

(The Secretary) No, I am not. And I don't see why it should. I mean I don't see why, if we make sensible approaches to Communist China and we indicate a willingness to become more friendly with them and improve our relations, in the hope that we can reduce tensions in that area -- why that should cause the Soviet Union to have any doubts about their willingness to pursue the SALT talks. I just don't understand that logic. And if they are reasoning that way, then we cannot figure out their logic because it is so illogical.

(Question) Mr. Secretary --

(The Secretary) Excuse me. I will come right back to you.

(Question) In connection with the China question, you talked about it a great deal on your recent trip. Is this Administration deliberately heading into or towards a two Chinas policy? Do we recognize both the mainland regime and the regime on Formosa?

(The Secretary) No, I don't think we are headed in any generalization of that kind. What we have said is our policy. We have taken initiatives in both the field of trade and travel. And we intend in the future, if we think it is wise, to take further steps in that direction. We would like to enter into discussions with Communist China. After that, depending on their reaction, if they show any interest in improving relations, then we will decide how to proceed. But we want to make it clear that their isolation from the rest of the world is of their own choosing. It is not our policy; it is their policy. And if they have this belligerent attitude toward the rest of the world and toward the United States, it is their attitude, their belligerency.

(Question) Mr. Secretary, I have been trying to invoke your considerable legal ability to ask a legal question which concerns the Thai and Laotian situation. It has been contended on the Hill, or it has been stated as a matter of record, that when the SEATO Treaty was up for discussion, that Secretary Dulles said that constitutional processes, as defined in the treaty, meant consideration by the Executive Branch and by the Legislative Branch.

Now, you have said here this morning that the Administration will, to the fullest extent possible, get the advice of Congress and consult with them in any future operations concerning the use of troops.

(The Secretary) And I said their consent, when appropriate.

(Question) Their consent when appropriate. Well, is it possible for you to say in any broad way in regard to the application of a treaty, such as the SEATO Treaty, whether in your legal judgment constitutional processes do involve action by the Legislative Branch as well as by the Executive Branch, or do you define it more narrowly?

(The Secretary) Well, I think that when we say "constitutional processes" it involves a whole bundle of things. Now, in terms of declaration of war, obviously it requires action by the Congress. In other areas it may not. But it may require Congressional action. I mean appropriations, all kinds of things require Congressional action.

But what I am saying, rather than trying to now decide and to tell you what we do under any given set of hypothetical facts, which I think would be most unwise, I do want to say that we intend to do our utmost to consult with Congress, to get their advice, and to get their approval and in any appropriate circumstance get their consent.

We don't have any intention of having a running battle with Congress. And I have a feeling that some of this is sort of an appendage that is a hangover from bygone days. It is not our attitude. We are not going to do that. And I would hope that in the discussions that Secretary Laird has with Senator Fulbright that this could be made clear.

Certainly Thailand is not asking for anything. Thailand has said yesterday that they will not ask for any help from us by way of armed forces, either in terms of insurgency created by internal conditions or insurgency resulting from outside instigation and support and direction. I don't know how you could say it more directly than that.

(The Press) Mr. Secretary, thank you, sir.

(The Secretary) Okay. Thank you.
