

THIS COPY FOR _____

NEWS CONFERENCE #861-A

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH GEORGE CHRISTIAN

4:15 P.M. EDT

JUNE 5, 1967

MONDAY

MR. CHRISTIAN: You are receiving two announcements. First is the President's intention to nominate James Russell Tuten from Georgia to be the first Federal co-chairman of the Coastal Plains Regional Commission.

The second announcement is the acceptance of the resignation of Robert H. B. Baldwin as Under Secretary of the Navy, and the President's intention to nominate Charles F. Baird, now Assistant Secretary for Financial Management, to be Mr. Baldwin's successor.

The President's schedule for tomorrow:

8:30 - Congressional Leadership Breakfast.

Q Bipartisan?

MR. CHRISTIAN: No. Democrats.

1:00 p.m. - The weekly luncheon with Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara, Walt Rostow and myself.

Q Any added starters tomorrow at the luncheon?

MR. CHRISTIAN: I don't know of any.

6:00 p.m. today - the President will meet again with Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, with Lucius D. Battle, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, with Mr. Walt Rostow, and I believe the Vice President will also join us.

Q You, too, George?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Yes.

Q Do you expect to have a statement for us after that meeting?

MR. CHRISTIAN: No, I would doubt that we would have anything after that meeting.

Q What is the purpose of the meeting? Can you enlighten us a little on it?

MR. CHRISTIAN: To review again the situation up to that hour.

Q On the Middle East?

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MR. CHRISTIAN: Yes.

Q George, will the Congressional Leaders at breakfast be concerned with the Middle East or legislative matters?

MR. CHRISTIAN: This meeting was scheduled beforehand, Jack. I am sure the subject will come up, though.

Q Can you review the situation as the White House now sees it, Mr. Secretary?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Ray, I have very little to add to the statement of this morning. The President, as announced, around the noon hour met again with Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara, after they had briefed the bipartisan leadership this morning.

The President has remained in close touch with the discussions this morning in the UN Security Council.

Q How has he done that, George? Has he watched it on television?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Partly; yes. He has received reports on the progress of the meetings.

Q George, the President got up at 4:00 o'clock this morning. Did he get some rest this afternoon?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Yes. The President ate a light lunch about 2:30 and then took a nap.

Q Did he have another conversation with Mr. Goldberg?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Not directly that I know of, Ray, since this morning.

Q Can you shed any light on whether the Egyptians who were reported coming to see the President are still coming? Do you have any knowledge of that?

MR. CHRISTIAN: As far as I know, Chuck, that is an open question. I understand that there was some discussion with the Government of the UAR on the possibility of a visit. Beyond that, I assume it to be still open.

Q Was there any thought, then, of the Vice President going to Cairo, as reported? Was there ever?

MR. CHRISTIAN: You say "ever." It has been a matter that has been considered. I know of nothing definite on that part of it, though.

Q Is it still under consideration, George, sending the Vice President to the Middle East?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Not at this point, I don't believe.

Q George, the trip of the two Egyptian officials to the United States was scheduled for Monday. It has been postponed from that date, hasn't it?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Peter, as far as I know it is open.

Q Do you mean it is still likely or possible?

MR. CHRISTIAN: I don't know that it is possible; I don't know that it is likely. I don't believe we have heard anything.

Q Are they still welcome to come, George?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Yes. The President is quite desirous of talking with anyone who can contribute toward a settlement of the conflict.

Q George, has the President been in touch with Moscow today?

MR. CHRISTIAN: In times like this there are numerous diplomatic channels open to various countries. But as I said this morning, I am not at liberty to discuss those matters.

Q What about the Hot Line, which is not diplomatic, but immediate?

MR. CHRISTIAN: I don't have any information. What do you mean, "What about the Hot Line?"

Q We have one, or we used to have one, between Moscow and the White House.

MR. CHRISTIAN: You said what about it?

Q Has the President used that?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Not that I know of.

Q George, the statement issued by the State Department today on neutrality was rather strong. It seemed in some respects to commit us to future neutrality. Does this mean in any way that the United States is drawing back from the 1950 Tripartite Agreement?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Bob, the President on May 23rd stated the position of this country. This morning our statement again said that we will devote all our energies to bring about an end to the fighting, and we called upon all parties to support the Security Council in bringing about an immediate cease fire.

I can't get into definitions beyond what the President has said, what the White House has said, which is the President's position in the matter.

Q The May 23rd statement also talks about preserving the territorial integrity.

MR. CHRISTIAN: That is correct.

Q How does that jibe with the position of neutrality?

MR. CHRISTIAN: As I say, I am not concerned so much

with definitions as I am with the statement the President has made, and the consistent position of this country regarding the territorial integrity of all the countries in that area.

Q A Senator said today that it was a moral commitment we had and not a legal commitment. Can you comment on that? He said that was the interpretation being put on it by the Administration.

MR. CHRISTIAN: Again, Carroll, I believe the statement by the President is his position, morally or otherwise. Let me find the exact language.

"The United States is firmly committed to the support of the political independence and territorial integrity of all the nations of the area."

Q George, was the State Department's statement on neutrality cleared with the White House before it was issued?

MR. CHRISTIAN: No.

Q Were you aware of it? That is what I am asking. Were you aware of it before it was issued?

MR. CHRISTIAN: No, I was not.

Q George, India proposed to the Security Council an immediate cease fire and withdrawal of troops to the position they occupied on Sunday. Could you tell us what the attitude of this Government is to India's proposal at the UN Security Council?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Again, the President said this morning, "We call upon all parties to support the Security Council in bringing about an immediate cease fire." That is the position.

Q What about the withdrawal of troops to the Sunday position?

MR. CHRISTIAN: The position of this Government is as given in the White House statement this morning.

Q George, is the President contemplating any talk to the Nation or any appearance to deal with this statement, or a film?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Not at this point.

Q Might there be one this evening or later today?

MR. CHRISTIAN: No.

Q You say "Not at this point."

MR. CHRISTIAN: I don't anticipate anything.

Q George, is the President planning any trip to the United Nations?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Not at this point.

Q George, how long has the possible trip by Vice President Humphrey been considered?

MR. CHRISTIAN: I don't know, Helen.

Q But it is under active consideration now?

MR. CHRISTIAN: That I do not know. I know at one point it was a matter of consideration.

Q You said a few minutes ago, if my notes are correct, that it was not under discussion now as far as you knew.

MR. CHRISTIAN: As far as I know, it is not.

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Q Let me be sure I understand you. You said at one point it was a matter of consideration.

MR. CHRISTIAN: Yes. As far as I know, it is not under discussion at the present time.

Q Can you give us a little more background on the context of that consideration, when this was?

MR. CHRISTIAN: No, I honestly don't know.

Q George, has the President talked with Ambassador Thompson today?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Ambassador Thompson is back in the country and he did see the President today.

Q When?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Just before the noon hour, I believe.

Q Has Ambassador Thompson gone back to Russia, do you know?

MR. CHRISTIAN: No, I don't believe he has.

Q Can you tell us who else the President saw today?

MR. CHRISTIAN: The President saw the Ambassador of Finland, Olavi Munkki.

Q What for, George?

MR. CHRISTIAN: The Ambassador is returning to Finland, and he presented a book to the President marking the 50th anniversary of Finland's independence.

Q What time was this?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Just before the President went to lunch this afternoon.

Q Anybody else?

MR. CHRISTIAN: I think I have given you everyone else.

The President, of course, has seen Mr. Rostow several times, and other staff members.

Q George, can you give us any information on the basis of what you people have been able to learn about what is actually going on, who is on which side of which border, who is winning, who is going forward and who is going backward?

MR. CHRISTIAN: No, in all honesty we can't. The reports are very unclear.

Q Just to give us some yardstick here, would

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it be your judgment that the kind of reports that are available to you now are not significantly more specific or accurate than the ones we get on the press wires?

MR. CHRISTIAN: I think that is a correct assessment.

They are not substantially different from the reports that are subsequently coming out.

As you know, when there is actual armed conflict, the public reports are pretty obvious and fairly fast incoming, where the clarifying reports sometimes take a little longer.

Q George, are there any reports of American casualties in the battle area?

MR. CHRISTIAN: I know of none.

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Q George, Can you tell us anything at all about what the President and Ambassador Thompson discussed; failing that, even how long they talked?

MR. CHRISTIAN: No, I don't have any more information on it for you other than the fact that they met.

Q Has the President talked to Prime Minister Wilson today?

MR. CHRISTIAN: As I have said this morning on the exchanges with other governments, I don't have anything for you.

Q George, last week you acknowledged toward the end of the week that we were supporting the British plan to line up maritime nations for a declaration of the international waterway through the Gulf of Aqaba. Is that effort still going ahead or has it become academic now? Are we still pursuing that plan?

MR. CHRISTIAN: There has been no specific change in that. The position of the Government is as the President stated it on May 23rd. There has been no specific change.

Q Are we any closer to a declaration by maritime powers?

MR. CHRISTIAN: I can't assess that for you, Chuck.

Q To your knowledge, is Ambassador Thompson going back, and do you know when?

MR. CHRISTIAN: I do not know when.

Q He is going back, to your knowledge?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Yes, to my knowledge he is going back, but I don't know when.

Q When did he come, George?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Within the last day or two.

Q George, on this matter of neutrality, do you see any conflict between our statement of a position of neutrality today and what these people in Congress are saying about our commitment?

MR. CHRISTIAN: No. I am not trying to draw any conflicts, Doug. The only thing I am attempting to do is to point out to you that the President's statement of May 23rd and the White House statement this morning constitute our position.

Q Are you saying that there is no conflict?

MR. CHRISTIAN: I say I am not trying to draw any conflicts on the thing. The President is trying to be totally fair in attempting to seek a peaceful settlement in the Middle East. As we have said, the focus is on the Security Council of the United Nations at this time.

Q George, to be quite clear about one thing, you are not suggesting that the President's statement of May 23rd and Mr. McCloskey's statement of this noon are in any way in conflict, are you?

MR. CHRISTIAN: No, I am not suggesting that.

Q Along that line, since you didn't see the neutrality statement, do you subscribe to it or would you amend it in any way? I am referring to McCloskey's statement.

MR. CHRISTIAN: Do you mean I didn't see it before he said it?

Q That is right.

MR. CHRISTIAN: No, I am not going to get into a discussion of whether I would --

Q I don't want a discussion. I want to know if that is our position.

MR. CHRISTIAN: I have stated to you the position of the President.

Q George, the statement of McCloskey is the position of the United States Government, isn't it?

MR. CHRISTIAN: I refer you, again, to the President's statements. I am not trying to --

Q But we now have something that has gone beyond the President's statement. We have something from a State Department spokesman. I think we should have it clearly on the record whether or not that is just his personal statement or whether this is the position of the Government. You are refusing to say so.

MR. CHRISTIAN: It is just merely not my intention to go beyond the President's statement and the White House statement on the existing situation other than I will point out that this country obviously is not a belligerent and is obviously seeking a peaceful settlement in the Middle East.

Q George, respectfully, I am confused. A spokesman for the State Department says this country's policy is one of neutrality, we are neutral. In questioning here, it seems to me, and perhaps I misunderstood, you don't confirm that. Is our policy one of neutrality or not?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Dan, you will just have to interpret my statements based upon the two statements which I have referred to.

Q Can we get an answer to Mr. Bailey's question before we go forward?

MR. CHRISTIAN: Repeat it.

Q Are you satisfied that Mr. McCloskey's statement conforms to the policy of the United States as laid down by the President in the two Presidential statements to which you refer?

MR. CHRISTIAN: I don't want to define anything that has been said beyond what the White House statements on the subject have been, Chuck. As I said, the President is trying to be fair about the whole matter and trying to achieve peace.

Q George, those White House statements nowhere mention neutrality, do they?

MR. CHRISTIAN: They do not.

Q Was Mr. McCloskey talking out of turn?

MR. CHRISTIAN: I am not going to get into that.

Q Do we still consider the Gulf of Aqaba as an international waterway and the blockade as illegal?

MR. CHRISTIAN: That is the position stated by the President on May 23rd, that the Gulf of Aqaba is an international waterway.

Q George, so that we don't go off down the wrong path, I hate to propose this but could you on a background basis explain to us why you seem to be disavowing Mr. McCloskey's statement? Is the Government speaking with two voices here deliberately?

MR. CHRISTIAN: On the record, I am not trying to disavow anything. I am pointing to the President's position on the matter without defining words or terms.

Q Could we go over this again? You say the McCloskey statement was not cleared here; that you did not know. Are you saying, George, that the President did not know that the State Department was going to issue a statement declaring us a neutral?

MR. CHRISTIAN: It is not unusual for questions to come up in State Department briefings and White House briefings that the other doesn't anticipate or know about until they occur.

Q This was not, then, a premeditated statement?

MR. CHRISTIAN: That I don't know.

Q No, it was an answer to a question.

MR. CHRISTIAN: It was an answer to a question.

Q George, do you reaffirm the State Department's statement that this country is neutral in thought, words and deed? Would you reaffirm it or not reaffirm it?

MR. CHRISTIAN: I said I wasn't going to get into the definition of terms used other than the ones the President has used.

Q George, could I ask this: In summing up for us the United States position, you are specifically including the two Presidential statements and specifically excluding the neutrality statement issued by McCloskey today; is that correct?

MR. CHRISTIAN: I would stay with what I have said on it.

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Q You haven't answered that question, George.

MR. CHRISTIAN: Let me put it in these terms: By my definition the United States is giving no active aid to either side. In other words, it is not a belligerent in the conflict. For interpretations of anything that has been said about it, other than this and the President's statement, and the HouseHouse statement this morning, I would have to refer you over to Secretary Rusk. Let him interpret it for you.

Q George, have any steps been taken to shut off any military supplies or aid that may be in the pipeline to Israel at this point?

MR. CHRISTIAN: I think Mr. McCloskey spoke on that subject this morning, Bruce. I don't have anything to add to it.

Q In connection with your last statement, George, when you said the United States is giving no active aid to either side, there are several military aid agreements in the pipelines. Have these been suspended?

MR. CHRISTIAN: I stay with what I said, that we are giving no active aid in the present conflict.

Q Wouldn't that be active aid?

MR. CHRISTIAN: There, again, on definitions, on interpretations I think Secretary Rusk would be best.

Q Can't you say whether the aid has been suspended or not?

MR. CHRISTIAN: No, I cannot say.

Q George, may I ask you the direct question, as the spokesman for the President, whether the United States is neutral in thought, word and deed in this conflict?

MR. CHRISTIAN: I just answered that in another way, Jim. I just answered the same question.

Q I would like a yes or no answer if I can get one.

MR. CHRISTIAN: I just answered the same question. On interpretations I would refer you over to Secretary Rusk.

Q George, what type of arrangements are you making on the coverage tonight?

MR. CHRISTIAN: We will have a standby arrangement, of course. I don't think it is necessary for anybody to stay around here.

Q George, is there any indication that the Shah of Iran may postpone or cancel his visit here?

MR. CHRISTIAN: I have heard of no plans to do so.

THE PRESS: Thank you, George.

END

(AT 4:43 PM EDT)