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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

PRESS BRIEFING
BY
LARRY SPEAKES

June 29, 1985

The Briefing Room

8:57 A.M. EDT

MR. SPEAKES: We have seen the reports by Nabih Berri that Americans from the TWA flight remain in the Beirut area. We have no comment on that statement. And we remain in touch with the Syrian government on this matter. We will advise you when there is something further.

Q Well, have we or will we give guarantees that we will not retaliate against Berri and any other people that he should so designate?

MR. SPEAKES: Sam, I'm not commenting, as you well know, that doesn't serve any purpose to answer --

Q Didn't you expect them to be on the road by now?

MR. SPEAKES: That was our understanding, that they were going to be -- go overland, as we said earlier. We'd been advised of that, that they would go overland to Damascus. And we had reports, as you all did, that they were on buses. And since that, we've been watching the matter closely and --

Q But have they not advised you -- have they not advised you any further than that?

MR. SPEAKES: Who?

Q Either the Berri people or our Embassy.

MR. SPEAKES: As I indicated, we've seen the statements. We have no comment on the statements.

Q Does the Embassy have anything to say?

Q Can you --

MR. SPEAKES: Once again, we have no comment.

Q You said --

Q Can you at least say whether you --

MR. SPEAKES: Let's don't -- Wait a minute, now. I'll stay here and answer every question, so --

Q I understand. We appreciate your forbearance. Can you at least say what your general reaction to this is? It's clearly a hitch. I mean, is it something that you expect to be ironed out?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes. When I say, "We have no comment," I think you know me well enough to know I mean no comment.

Q Is Ambassador Bartholomew still in touch with Berri?

MR. SPEAKES: Ambassador Bartholomew is certainly on the

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scene, and -- I don't know specifically what he's done.

Q Just to clarify, you said you've been in touch with -- you remain in touch with the Syrian government. Can you tell us about any contacts with Berri and Washington?

MR. SPEAKES: -- just asked that. I don't know of any Washington contacts.

Q -- Bartholomew.

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q Do you know what has happened?

MR. SPEAKES: As I say, we have no comment on the status.

Q You do know if a hitch has developed? Or, I mean, how can you have no comment?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, I just did.

Q You had them on the road, one minute, as of four hours ago.

MR. SPEAKES: As I say, we've seen the statements and we have no comment.

Q Do you stand by your previous briefing?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, would you look at my previous briefing and look at it carefully, please?

Q Yes, I will. Do you stand by it?

MR. SPEAKES: Sure.

Q Larry, at 4:00 a.m., you said that they were on the way. Was that based more on press reports, rather than a direct confirmation?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, now, I don't think what I said this morning is inconsistent at all with the facts, if you use your head and think a little bit.

Q So you meant that they were in the process of getting ready to move, but you did not have --

MR. SPEAKES: We said that we had seen the reports that they were on buses. That's where we stood.

Q I have a followup to that before I get into the other question. Didn't you -- didn't a Senior Administration Official indicate that that was from government officials in addition to news reports, thereby giving it more credibility than --

MR. SPEAKES: That what was on --

Q About the buses.

MR. SPEAKES: What was from government --

Q About the buses being --

Q They were on buses to the airport.

MR. SPEAKES: Once again, like I say, don't -- what I said this morning is certainly not inconsistent with what I said now, if you'll look very closely.

Q I take it the President will not be in the Briefing Room around 9:00 a.m. or 10:00 a.m. now.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He'll be in the Briefing Room, as I said, ON BACKGROUND, when they are aboard a U.S. aircraft.

ON THE RECORD.

Q What's the President doing now, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: Just receiving phone updates in the Residence.

Welcome back. Did you pick today?

Q Yes.

Q Comes for the big stories.

Larry, before, when you've been asked about any possible concessions, you've always said, "We'll make none." But you were asked early on here your response to these extensible demands of Berri, and you said, "No comment." Now, does that indicate that --

MR. SPEAKES: Well, I don't know of any demands of Berri.

Q Well, the ones that have been reported --

Q You said you've seen reports.

Q -- is that the hitch is that he wants assurances that there would be no retaliation and that the fleet will be moved. Are you -- would you stand by your initial statement there will be no concessions, period?

MR. SPEAKES: As I said, we have not changed our position on anything in the past that we've stated. And there is no comment on Berri's statement.

Sheila.

Q Larry, where -- do we know where are the hostages now? And are they -- are all 39 together?

MR. SPEAKES: Once again, I have no comment beyond what Berri's said.

Q If this drags on into the afternoon or beyond, will the President make his radio speech? And, if you want to go on background, would you tell us of general --

MR. SPEAKES: The President will make his radio speech, yes.

Q On this subject? Is it this subject?

MR. SPEAKES: It depends on what he wants to say. He'll say what he wants to say when he gets on the air.

Q Depends on where they are, right?

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

9:02 A.M. EDT

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