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*Last Updated: 01/17/2025*

THE WHITE HOUSE  
Office of the Press Secretary

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PRESS BRIEFING  
BY  
LARRY SPEAKES

January 31, 1985  
The Briefing Room

12:19 P.M. EST

INDEX

SUBJECT

PAGE

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Presidential schedule.....1  
    Action Director  
    Luncheon with Vice President  
    Meeting with Senator Mattingly  
Outreach Working Group on Central America

DOMESTIC

Prayer Breakfast.....1-2  
House Armed Services Committee Meeting/Arms Control.....2-4  
Farm Task Force.....7  
Edwin Meese.....8

FOREIGN

Mid East Arms Sales.....4-7

#1317-01/31

12:32 P.M. EST

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PRESS BRIEFING  
BY  
LARRY SPEAKES

January 31, 1985

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12:19 P.M. EST

MR. SPEAKES: The President today is announcing the appointment of Donna M. Alvarado to be Director of the ACTION Agency.

Today, he's having lunch with the Vice President -- at this moment -- in the Oval Office.

And at 1:00 p.m., the meeting with Senator Mack Mattingly has been moved up to that hour.

White House Outreach Working Group on Central America will hold a briefing and show a film today at 3:15 p.m., following the remarks. The film will be "Crisis in the Americas," a 30-minute documentary, Central America. It's the first showing of it. Produced by the American Security Council Foundation. Coverage: 456-6623.

On the President's Prayer Breakfast remarks this morning, the monk is the same monk he was last year, which we told you. (Laughter.) Your memory's not very good. Telemachus, T-e-l-e-m-a-c-u-s, Fourth Century monk, Asian. Billy Graham told the President about this a couple of years ago, provided the President with all the documentation for the story.

Q It's not true, though. I'm sorry, it's just not true.

MR. SPEAKES: You take it up with Billy Graham.

And, as the President pointed out -- you want to know who these world meetings --

Q Yes.

Q Yes.

MR. SPEAKES: -- spiritual meetings with? You didn't listen to the President's speech. "I could say more about it, but it's working precisely because it's private." It'll stay private.

The President this morning met with --

Q Would you repeat that, Larry --

MR. SPEAKES: The President said -- if you had been listening in a worshipful manner -- "I wish I could say more about it, but it's working precisely because it's private." It will remain private, as far as I'm concerned. (Laughter.)

Q But what is it?

Q Well, does he have private meetings here, prayer meetings here?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't -- No, he does not have private

MORE

#1317-01/31

prayer meetings here. (Laughter.)

Q But, I mean, is he -- We really ought to get the picture because we have to write it. Is he saying that all over the world, even in maybe communist areas, they're having meetings?

MR. SPEAKES: He said what he said. Says, "Members of our Congress have met with leaders and officials from other countries, approaching them and speaking to them on a spiritual level." That's happened.

Q He says it's being kept secret, then he reveals it. I don't quite understand -- (laughter.)

MR. SPEAKES: The President just --

Q Has he --

MR. SPEAKES: What?

Q He participated in these? And is this a network? Or are these all ad hoc groups?

MR. SPEAKES: To quote a great man, "I wish I could say more about it, but it's working precisely because it's private."

Q Then why did he talk about it?

Q Yes.

Q Well, has he participated in it?

MR. SPEAKES: Once again -- (laughter) -- refer back to previous.

This morning, the President met with members of the House Armed Services Committee. A couple of things that -- he essentially went over his discussion yesterday in which he pointed out the need for bipartisanship as we approach our discussions with the Soviets in Geneva, the need for restoring -- continuing restoring our national security. "I believe we now have an opportunity for gaining arms control agreements that actually reduce forces.

"I would remind those who are concerned with the cost of national security

the only way we can reduce that cost --

Q Is produce more genies. (Laughter.)

MR. SPEAKES: -- is to reduce the need for it."

In discussions about bipartisanship, the President indicated that he believes that we're returning to Geneva "in a large measure because the strength of our resolve and the unity shown by our allies over the past four years to rebuild our national defense have gotten the Soviets' attention."

In discussion, as far as the MX is concerned, "If we cannot make a decision to build 100 missiles to restore our aging nuclear deterrent when they have deployed over 800 MX-class missiles, there is no incentive for the Soviets in these talks."

Q There is no incentive?

MR. SPEAKES: Incentive.

Q How many missiles did they deploy?

MR. SPEAKES: Over 800 MX-class.

Q What is that class, Larry, do you know?

MR. SPEAKES: No. What do they call -- is it --

MR. SIMS: -- SS-18s.

Q -- 18s.

MR. SPEAKES: -- 18s.

And that's it. Anything else you've got --

Q Did he -- he used the term "MX-class" as opposed to Peacekeeper?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes. Well, the MX-class refers to the Soviets.

Q And these exact quotes again?

Q So, what was --

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q -- the response in the meeting?

MR. SPEAKES: Once again, a discussion -- a round-table discussion. You've heard what they've said out here.

David?

Q Larry, the part about reducing the cost of national security, is the President suggesting that a nuclear arms control agreement would significantly reduce the need for defense budgets? I was under the impression that those weapons are actually a very small part of the defense budget.

MR. SPEAKES: The specific weapons there, but a serious arms control agreement in the long run would reduce the need for national defense spending.

Q If he doesn't get funding for building the 100 MXs, does he believe he flat out cannot then get an agreement with the Soviets -- an acceptable agreement with --

MR. SPEAKES: The President strongly believes it would have an impact on the talks, but --

Q Well, can he get -- but does he think he can still get one if he doesn't have it?

MR. SPEAKES: It remains to be seen. He thinks it would seriously weaken our position, yes, to show resolve.

Gerald?

Q These 800 MX-class missiles are all SS-18s?

MR. SPEAKES: Are they all 18s or they 20s?

MR. SIMS: I think it's a combination. They built two types of missiles at least that are comparable to the MX, and these are the 17 and 18 -- I don't have at the top of my head the exact numbers of each kind.

Q But they're 17s and 18s?

Q So, 17s --

MR. SIMS: Right.

MR. SPEAKES: Charles?

Q Larry, are there going to be more of these sessions? We've gone through two House committees? How far does this go? How many more sales --

MR. SPEAKES: I don't have -- do you have your long range -- I don't think there are any more specifics on the defense budget.

Q What about the Budget Committee?

MR. SPEAKES: Charles?

Pardon?

Q -- Budget Committee?

MR. SPEAKES: I'll have to look at tomorrow. There are about three or four meetings, and I don't know -- have we done them all?

Q These are a prelude --

Q -- the comparable Senate committees?

Q -- for acceptance of the defense figures?

MR. SPEAKES: Prelude for a presentation and hopeful acceptance.

Q When will we ever see him again?

Q New subject?

Q Tomorrow?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know. I haven't looked at tomorrow's schedule to see if there's anything.

Q New subject?

MR. SPEAKES: New subject.

Q Yes, going back to the Mid East arms sale study, you

MORE

#1317-1/31

said that it was going to take four to six weeks to do the study.  
Correct?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q The paper says that but then also says it'll be several months before any proposals are made up to the Hill after that study. Is that true?

MR. SPEAKES: I think we would have to wait until the study is completed to decide

how soon we would proceed with the -- with any sales requests to Congress.

MR. SIMS: Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes?

MR. SIMS: You might make the point that this study is the whole strategic situation in the Middle East. It's not just a question of studying arms sales.

Q Like what? What do you mean?

Q Is this a review of our entire policy?

Q It's a -- political also?

MR. SIMS: Security situation in the Middle East -- what would make the countries in the region more secure.

Q Well, you're saying that we are going to review our entire range of Middle East policy, then.

MR. SIMS: Reviewing the security relationship of countries in the Middle East. Part of that review would include what role arms sales play and what we should do in recommending to Congress arms sales for --

Q You mean, you are not saying the President is reviewing his own September 1982 Middle East peace approach?

MR. SPEAKES: No.

MR. SIMS: No, no.

MR. SPEAKES: You could call it a comprehensive look at security-related issues in the area. We do not anticipate any fundamental changes in our policy or commitments to the region. As I said yesterday, we would like to call it a refined overview of security issues.

Q On that, you had said that you thought The Times had come down too hard. What they said was, suspending new arms sales. Is that correct? You're suspending new arms sales until after this?

MR. SPEAKES: In the next four to six weeks, we will not be sending up any requests for new arms sales. But I think the word, "suspending" sort of spells out that we're calling a halt to everything. No.

Q A halt in new. They always used the word "new." You object to that?

MR. SPEAKES: No. I mean, we won't be doing it over the four to six-week period and we'll decide then what we'll do.

Q Well, you're -- but what about the months?

MR. SPEAKES: Pardon?

Q After the four to six-week review, then you're going to write a proposal --

MR. SPEAKES: As I told Chris, we won't know until we get through with the study.

Q But why do you object to the word "suspending," then if it's not going to happen until this proposal comes out?

MR. SPEAKES: I think your first impression probably when

you read the story was that we'd come to a screeching halt on that, and it's just not true. It's just a review we're taking. I just wanted to guide you that it wasn't nearly as hard as the first impression might be, not faulting The Times, just faulting the way we all read.

Q Are the Gulf States, Iran and Iraq, involved in this review?

MR. SPEAKES: I think the Iran -- I don't anticipate any changes --

Q Obviously not, but --

MR. SPEAKES: Any changes in our policy as far as that war is concerned, but certainly, the impact of that war, yes --

Q How do you know --

MR. SPEAKES: -- and the threats to security that it poses -- things like Libyan threats, and so forth.

Q But not a suggestion that we might change our supply policy involving --

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know of any plans to change that, no.

Q Well, how can you anticipate what the results of the review will be? Is the key word "fundamental" change? I mean, there could be change, couldn't there?

MR. SPEAKES: I guess there could be change, but you'd have to --

Q Well, why are you reviewing it if you, you know, you're going to take the status quo, keep it?

MR. SPEAKES: That's what I say. No fundamental change, we're not backing off.

So, Jessie?

Q Well --

Q I have a two-part question. Recently, the President and Senator Dole discussed a farm task force. Has there been any action on it?

MR. SPEAKES: Not that I'm aware of.

Q Well, does he realize that March is a crucial month for the farmers?

MR. SPEAKES: He does.

Q My other question is, the President made a commitment to the farmers a few months ago where he said he would give more money to the Farmers' Home Administration. Will he release from \$2 to \$4 billion to the Farm Home Administration so that farmers can get loans for March?

MR. SPEAKES: Jessie, I just do not know. I'll have to check in with the Agriculture Department and our people here to see where we stand on that. I don't have the answer.

Yes.

Q Is there a Cabinet Council meeting this afternoon --

MR.-SPEAKES: Cabinet Council? There is a Cabinet Council meeting -- not with the President. I do not know the subject.

Q Do you know which Cabinet Council that is?

MR. SPEAKES: I really don't.

Ben?

Q Did the President have any reaction to Senator Biden's statements yesterday in the Meese hearing?

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q Does the President still stand behind his nominee?

Q Say no and make some news. (Laughter.)

Q Yes, that would be great.

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Anything else?

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

12:32 P.M. EST

#1317-01/31