

37th President of the United States: 1969 - 1974

Remarks to Reporters on the Forthcoming European Trip

February 22, 1969

THIS LOOKS like a rather sizable number of people who are going on this trip.

As Ron Ziegler has already indicated to you, I thought it might be helpful if I were to talk to you on the record for Sunday release about some of the logistical aspects of the trip which he may not have covered. At least I will elaborate on them and also give you some indications of what I think may be accomplished by the trip and what may not be accomplished by it beyond what I indicated in my press conference a couple of weeks ago.

Let me begin by one assertion that will put it in context as far as those who have the responsibility of covering this kind of trip.

I am keenly aware of the fact that you have a very difficult problem insofar as the daily news flow is concerned. That is true always on this kind of trip, a Presidential trip. I have talked to many in this room about the problems you have had in traveling with Presidents to summit conferences and the rest, and the thousands of--well, there will be literally thousands of people and sometimes hundreds of reporters who are there with the small amounts of official news items that seem to come out.

This trip will be difficult in that respect because there will be no formal communiqués. We are not going for the purpose of negotiating any outstanding differences and so there won't be any spectacular news in that respect.

On the other side of the coin, the trip will be short on that kind of protocol excitement that you usually associate with a trip. There will be, of course, the honors that are usually rendered for a foreign head of state and all that sort of thing.

But you will not have as much of the color and all the other things that sometimes substitute for the hard news.

However, I will do everything that I can during the course of the trip to see that those who go with us from the State Department, from my own staff, brief you on anything of substance that can appropriately be covered. You must have in mind---and I know you all will have in mind--the fact that in the conversations that I have with heads of government or heads of state, it will not be possible to cover those conversations except in the broadest terms insofar as the subjects that were covered, because the very purpose of that kind of discussion would be destroyed if there were substantial news coverage afterwards of what was discussed. There may be some exceptions that will develop. But that will depend upon conversations that I have.

But I do want you to know that we will be as responsive as possible.

Now, in terms of news also, I will start at the end and then come back to the beginning. We will return, as you know, Sunday night. Monday I will spend here catching up on the signing of documents and so forth, that I understand will be on the desk when I return, on the domestic scene.

Tuesday morning there will be a meeting of the National Security Council in which I will report on various aspects of the trip and it will be discussed.

Then, either Tuesday afternoon or Wednesday morning I will have a meeting with the bipartisan leadership. I am planning then on Thursday to have a press conference, a press conference in this instance which will be different in one respect from the ones we have had previously. It will be my

intention to speak at the outset for a few minutes, giving some general observations with regard to what I found in Europe, and then to have questions on a broad range, primarily devoted to that.

It is my plan on that occasion to let the conference go for an hour so that you can get more answers in depth. I think that will serve your purposes more usefully than otherwise.

That will be in lieu of the usual, I say the usual or the sometimes used, technique of coming back and making a nationwide report simply through a speech.

I thought that the press conference would elicit more really substantial information on the trip and on my views and on what I found in Europe than simply to make a statement.

I will make a statement at the outset for a few minutes and then have questions. So much for that.

Now, in terms of the logistics of the trip itself, as you already know, on my part, the substantial amount of time will be spent in the face-to-face discussions with the heads of government and heads of state.

Those conversations will cover, I can now report, a very broad area of subjects. We have heard from each government and, for that matter, each head of government and each head of state, the subjects that they would like generally to discuss.

I have also had discussions at the ambassadorial level and we have had discussions also abroad at the ambassadorial level in that respect.

There are three general categories that should be mentioned. First, I would expect to discuss all bilateral matters of substance which the other government may want to bring up and also those which we might think would be appropriate.

Second, it would be my intention to discuss also multilateral matters, particularly those that involve the Alliance and our relations with other countries in Europe. In each of those countries that we will be visiting we will be bringing up some multilateral matters.

Third, there will be a substantial amount of time spent on subjects that are neither bilateral or multilateral or relating only to Europe. There will be a substantial amount of discussion, from the indications that I have received from the heads of government and heads of state abroad, on general subjects in the field of foreign affairs in which I will be extremely interested in getting the advice and the best thinking of the leaders abroad on those subjects--East-West relations, for example, arms control. I have already indicated that there will be discussions with our European friends on the possibility and the desirability of having discussions with the Soviet Union on various subjects, discussions of our relations--not only our relations but theirs--with underdeveloped countries, aid programs, for example; discussions also with regard to other areas of the world---Latin America, Africa, and Asia in which we may have a common interest.

Now, on this latter point, I should emphasize a conviction that has been mine for many years based on what I have learned from previous trips. I have found that it is very valuable for anyone on the American scene in Government to go abroad and talk to leaders abroad, not only in Europe but all over the world, to talk to them with a very broad agenda, not limited to the bilateral matters of hard substance which usually come up. I think this is particularly important now.

We hear it said that the United States is the leader of the free world and because of our wealth and because of our military strength we would have to be described very objectively as being in that position.

But free world leadership, in my view, does not mean dictatorship to the free world. It means consultation with the free world and developing from the leaders of the free world the best possible thinking that we can develop for attacking our common problems.

There may be, for example, instances in which the United States alone must make decisions which can affect the peace of the world. I want to get the best advice of the European leaders on those decisions.

I can say from experience, and I don't say this simply because I happen to be going to visit these men very shortly, that in previous years I have found there is a great well of knowledge, wisdom, and experience among our European friends; that it is very valuable for an American to go abroad and tap that knowledge, wisdom, and experience.

Consequently, I was delighted to find that when they suggested the agenda items, they were not limited to the bilateral subjects and not limited to the Alliance and their relations to it, but that they were keenly interested in discussing a broad variety of subjects involving world policy-world policy where the United States might have the primary responsibility, but where they, even though they did not have a substantial responsibility, at least might be able to make a contribution, a contribution in thinking as to how the problem could be solved.

Now, as far as the subjects are concerned, there are some, of course, that will be quite generally brought up.

I should begin with the subject of the Mideast. The Mideast will be brought up in all of the visits that I have. I put a high priority on this subject, as on many others, but particularly on this one, because after we complete this trip, it will then be, it seems to me, appropriate for the United States to make a determination as to how talks should go forward on the Mideast.

As you know, preliminary talks are now going forward in the U.N. on the four power basis, bilaterally first, with the possibility of four-power talks later coming up.

What I want to do is to have direct discussions with all of the European leaders, but particularly with the British and the French, on this subject so that we may be able to find some common principles that will make these talks, which will be coming up, more effective than they otherwise might be and that will move them along at a faster pace.

I should leave here one thought that I have mentioned before, but I emphasize it again now: This is not with the thought that the four powers are going to dictate a settlement in the Mideast. It is with the thought, however, that if the four powers are going to contribute to a settlement that it will be most useful at this time to have these direct discussions, and that subject is on the agenda. We have prepared it very carefully. We know positions that we are prepared to discuss and we will be expecting to discuss that with them. I use that as an example.

Now, in addition, other matters that will come up in every country are trade and monetary matters in the broadest sense. We will be prepared to discuss such matters. There will be some differences of views there as well as on the Mideast and other subjects. Of course they vary, as all of you are aware, depending upon the country which we may be visiting.

The problems of the Alliance we will be prepared to discuss in depth, and beyond that a number of bilateral subjects that I have already indicated in the East-West relations.

One further thought that perhaps is worth mentioning is that as I go to Europe for this trip, I am reminded of the fact that it was 22 years ago that I first went as a freshman Congressman, as a member of the Herter committee. As I was preparing to come down to meet with you today, I was thinking of how much things had changed in that 22 years.

Twenty-two years ago when we took off for Europe--I remember with Christian Herter, the chairman of the committee, later, as you will recall, our Secretary of State--we went there with the United States in a preeminent position both economically and militarily in the world, and as far as the Europeans were concerned, preeminent in the world militarily because we then had a monopoly on atomic weapons, and economically, the United States was infinitely strong.

The Europeans, of course, economically, militarily, and many of them, spiritually, were on their backs. I recall then that we went to Europe for the purpose of attempting to indicate to them what we would do what we thought they should do. And they welcomed our leadership. They wanted our leadership. They needed our leadership because they were neither militarily, economically, or politically strong enough to provide it.

I think it was a high act of statesmanship on our part and on theirs that we were able to work out a multilateral arrangement on the aid programs which was effective, as it was.

But today the situation, I am keenly aware, has changed and all of you who have studied it, of course, are perhaps even as much aware of it, if not more.

Today, from an economic standpoint, we go to a Europe with some variations, of course: that is, economically infinitely stronger than it was then, and in some instances they are in a stronger position with their currency than perhaps we might be, or at least that has been the case sometimes in recent years.

We find a Europe that from a political standpoint has regained political stability and therefore speaks with more independence than was the case previously.

We find, also, that insofar as the military situation is concerned, the world has changed, and as the world has changed, the problems in Europe have changed, not only because of the acquisition of nuclear weapons on the part of the Soviet Union, but because of the development of NATO--of course that was not there at that time.

What this requires us to do now, I think, is to recognize that the United States could make perhaps no greater mistake now than to treat the situation that we find there as it was then.

I am not suggesting that that is a mistake that has been made, but it is one that could be made. That is why I have emphasized that I am not going to Europe for the purpose of lecturing the Europeans, of telling them that we know best, and of telling them to follow us.

We are going there to listen to them, to exchange views, to get their best information and their best advice as to how their problems should be solved and how world problems should be solved. We need their advice and we are going there very honestly trying to seek it.

I think in that spirit we will be able to accomplish several objectives. I said at the outset that you should not expect spectacular news from this trip. I do say, however, that it will be solid news--solid in the sense that as a result of this trip there will be a new spirit of consultation which will result in a new spirit of confidence among our European friends and ourselves.

I believe that this first discussion will lead to others. I believe that the foreign ministers conference that will be held here on the 20th anniversary of NATO will be a more productive conference, looking toward purpose, as I have indicated at my press conference a couple of weeks ago.

I believe also that the meetings that I will expect to have--probably in the United States, with the various leaders that I will be seeing in Europe on this occasions will be far more useful now that we have started on this kind of basis with my going to Europe first, talking to them, and having long discussions face to face, without feeling the pressure of having to make some kind of settlement of an outstanding crisis problem that comes upon us.

What I am really, perhaps, hoping for most out of this trip is that as a result of it the United States interest in and the United States support of the European-American relationship has never been stronger and has never been more needed if we are going to have a peaceful world.

Secondly, that there will be a new era of consultation, and I mean real give-and-take consultation, between the leaders of the European-American community. We need it, I want it, and I was very happy to find that our colleagues in Europe also want it and need it. I am looking forward to that.

Well, when we return, I will be glad to try to expand on some of these questions that I have not answered in these opening remarks. I would like to just close on one social note.

This is a very large group here and very few of you, maybe half of you, have been on trips with me before. But I am sure that people like Pete Lisagor [Chicago Daily News], and others who have--Bill Theis [Hearst Newspapers], who went on the first one in 1953--will recall that it has always been one of my customs prior to going on a trip to have some sort of a get-together with the members of the traveling press and then afterwards to have a reunion.

I didn't know whether it was possible now that I have moved to this position, but I thought it was worth trying, so I am delighted that you can all come. I won't have the intimate contact that I have always tried to have with the members of the press on such a trip. It isn't possible now, but we will do our best to make it good from a logistical standpoint. I hope that when we return, not only in the more formal press conference, but in the reception which we will hope to have at some time afterwards, I will have a chance to see you all again personally. And now we will move into the State Dining Room if you like and we can chat a bit more.

Thank you.

Note: The President spoke at 5:15 p.m. on Friday, February 21, in the East Room at the White House. His remarks were issued in the form of a White House press release on February 22, 1969.

Also released on February 22 were a list of members of the President's party and of the news media representatives accompanying the President on his European trip and background information on previous visits abroad that President Nixon had made.