

FORD DROPS TRIP, CITING LEBANON

Cancels Campaign Journey After Ordering Help for Those Leaving Beirut

By DAVID BINDER
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 18 — President Ford canceled an election campaign trip to Iowa today after having directed the United States Embassy in Beirut to assist American citizens who wanted to leave Lebanon.

Ron Nessen, the White House spokesman, said that the Iowa trip had been called off "because of the impending evacuation and the situation in Lebanon."

In a personal statement on Lebanon, Mr. Ford avoided the word "evacuation" with regard to the estimated total of 1,400 American citizens still in the country.

The President had been scheduled to attend a testimonial dinner in Des Moines for Mary Louise Smith, the Republican Party's national chairman, before the selection of Iowa's delegates to the Republican National Convention.

Surprise Is Expressed

Some State Department officials privately expressed surprise at the President's abrupt change of plans. White House officials, however, credited Mr. Ford with having put policy ahead of politics.

At the State Department today, Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger told reporters that it was appropriate for Mr. Ford to remain in Washington because the Lebanese situation had become "very ticklish" and "an emergency could develop" in the evacuation.

Today's statement by the President said:

"Due to the continuing un-

certainty of the situation in Beirut, I have directed the United States Embassy there to assist in the departure by overland convoy to Damascus of U.S. citizens who wish to depart Lebanon at this time."

He added: "The convoy is expected to leave Beirut Saturday, and American citizens are being alerted both by the embassy and by broadcast on the Voice of America to be prepared for departure at that time if they so wish."

Convoy Goes to Damascus

According to word from the scene, a 13-vehicle convoy organized by the British Embassy and including some Americans traveled from Beirut to Damascus today. Tomorrow's convoy, also to Damascus, is also being organized by the British.

Early today a news agency dispatch from Washington said that President Ford had directed the embassy in Beirut to evacuate Americans from Lebanon. Later word, however, showed that he had not gone that far and that few Americans wanted to leave anyway.

The word "evacuation" was used in public by Mr. Kissinger when he testified yesterday before the House International Relations Committee on the Lebanese situation after the killing Wednesday of Ambassador Francis E. Meloy Jr. and two of his aides in Beirut.

Since then some high-ranking Administration officials have advised against using the word, since it seemed to imply the involvement of military rescue teams, as in the evacuation of Americans from Cambodia and South Vietnam during the Communist victories there.

Contingency Planning

According to these officials, both Britain and the United States had for some time been weighing contingency plans for organizing large-scale departures of Western citizens from Lebanon.

They said that the British pressed ahead at the beginning of this week in obtaining promises of safe passage for several convoys of buses, cars and taxis to Syria but that the United

States Government had been reluctant to participate.

At a press briefing, Robert L. Funseth, the State Department spokesman, said that Ambassador Meloy's last cablegram to Washington before he was killed in an ambush "discussed American participation in that convoy."

"Sadly his remains went out in the first British convoy yesterday," Mr. Funseth added.

Yesterday Mr. Kissinger told Congress that Ambassador Meloy was on his way to discuss the convoy proposals with a senator-elect, when he was kidnapped and killed.

The Administration officials said that the killing had encouraged the British to proceed with the convoy arrangements and that last night, at a White House meeting with his national security advisers, President Ford concluded that the United States had no choice but to follow suit.

In his statement this morning, Mr. Ford emphasized again that the United States Embassy in Beirut would remain open and active. He said: "Only those embassy officials not essential to our continuing operations will be leaving Lebanon. The American Embassy in Beirut is to remain open to continue our efforts to help bring an end to the strife which has brought this tragedy to Lebanon."

Ford Confers Again

At the State Department, Mr. Funseth said that the administration had received "assurances of safe conduct" for the Saturday convoy, but he declined to elaborate because "the operation is a sensitive one."

While acknowledging that it was a British initiative and would be conducted by the British Embassy in Beirut, Mr. Funseth said:

"I think it is an international convoy. It is not a question of tagging along."

Apparently President Ford has ordered the Defense Department to keep an eye on the convoy Saturday, by radio and possibly by aerial reconnaissance. But Administration officials declined to discuss such measures.

President Ford conferred on Lebanon for more than an hour

continued



President Ford and advisers at the White House on Thursday, during one of several meetings on the evacuation of Americans from Lebanon. Others are, from left: Gen. George S. Brown, Chairman of the

White House Photograph/David Hume Kennerly and David Bossy, Joint Chiefs of Staff; George Bush, director of Central Intelligence; Richard B. Cheney, presidential assistant; L. Dean Brown, who recently served as special envoy to Lebanon; Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger.

this morning with Mr. Kissinger, George Bush, director of Central Intelligence; Brent Scowcroft, national security adviser; William Clements, Deputy Secretary of Defense; and Richard B. Cheney, White House chief of staff.

It was the third such meeting in three days, and Mr. Ford

scheduled a fourth round for this evening "to oversee" Lebanese developments including "the evacuation," according to Mr. Nessen.

The spokesman said that he was "astounded" at suggestions of reporters that it was "a trumped-up crisis," and termed the Lebanese situation "ex-

tremely deplorable."

Mr. Ford plans to be at Andrews Air Force Base, just east of the capital, tomorrow afternoon when the bodies of Ambassador Meloy and the Beirut Embassy economic counselor, Robert O. Waring, arrive here on a military plane from the Middle east.