

### 103. Memorandum of Conversation<sup>1</sup>

Saigon, July 30, 1969.

#### PARTICIPANTS

President Richard Nixon  
President Nguyen Van Thieu  
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger  
Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker  
Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc

After President Thieu's welcoming remarks, the President responded that this was his eighth visit to Viet-Nam, and that he felt it important at this time to come to the country's capital. It would demonstrate to Hanoi that we stand together as well as the fact that Saigon is a safe place. It was fortuitous that the moon landing provided an opportunity for his Asian trip and for another discussion with President Thieu.

The President complimented President Thieu on his July 11 statement, saying that he thought that it had been both courageous and forthcoming. It had had a good reception in the United States and in world opinion; a number of Senators who have been critical of our policy in Viet-Nam were now saying that the next move was up to Hanoi. The President went on to say he believed that we have gone now as far as we should and that the next move was up to the other side. "We can't have you nibbled away. That is something that we are not willing to permit."

President Thieu responded by explaining the situation he had had to confront here in view of some of the doubts his statement had created. It had been necessary to spend some time in explaining to members of the Assembly, to the Province and District Chiefs, the military, and civil servants, the GVN's "good will for peace." This he had done

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1023, Presidential/HAK Memcons, President Nixon and Thieu, 7/30/69. Top Secret; Nodis; MoonGlow. The meeting was held at Independence Palace. Kissinger sent copies of this memorandum to Rogers and Richardson on August 13. Bunker sent the original to Kissinger under cover of a memorandum of August 19 in which he wrote: "I think it [the meeting] went exceedingly well. From the preliminary soundings we have taken, this seems to be an almost unanimous opinion here. In reading the transcript of yesterday's [July 31] plenary session in Paris, it appears that Hanoi got the message." (Ibid., Box 138, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. IX, 8/1/69–8/31/69) According to the President's Daily Diary, Nixon and Thieu met at the Palace from noon to 5:35 p.m. This time apparently includes the discussion with the advisers; see footnote 3 below. (Ibid., White House Central Files)

through means of press conferences and meetings. He felt that the impression now was that he has been forthcoming and has made a generous offer for serious negotiations and a move toward peace, but that this should be the last offer until there is some response from the other side.

President Thieu went on to say that he felt we must keep the door open in Paris; that we have won support of the free world because of the forthcoming proposals we have both made and that we must, therefore, not withdraw from the talks. As long as the other side continues to nourish the hope of winning by whatever method, military or political, we must stand firm. But, he added, we stand ready to discuss anything and in any way, publicly or privately. The problem is whether the other side is really ready to negotiate. Until now they have been reluctant and we have not seen evidence of a real intention to move ahead.

The President asked President Thieu how his moves toward political organization were progressing.

President Thieu replied by saying that as the situation now stands, we have offered to enter into reasonable and serious talks with the communists. The question is whether they are willing to talk reasonably or will choose to continue the war. If they choose the latter, the war may take on a different character. The enemy may choose to carry on at a slower tempo, eventually even to fade away; thus it might go on this way for four or five years. We have to be prepared for the fact that it might take this course. We, therefore, have to move ahead on various fronts: a) to strengthen our military forces; b) to expand pacification, to extend security through land reform and other measures to bring the people along with us; c) to consolidate the people with the government; d) to secure the collaboration of political parties in support of the government; e) to work toward collaboration of the Assembly and the Executive and f) to fashion a broader based Cabinet.

South Viet-Nam must become stronger politically, militarily, and economically.

President Thieu added that the GVN might have suggestions about our AID program, especially about procedures, in order to help the economy grow more rapidly. He felt this was important to the overall effort. The President replied that we intended to continue to provide economic aid and would be interested in their suggestions.

President Thieu went on to say that the feeling here is that President Nixon's trip should be seen in the context of a diplomatic move to stimulate progress toward a solution in Paris. He wondered what the relative influence of Russia and China on the talks is. In any case, President Thieu felt that it was important to make preparations for what he called a "long haul, low cost" policy while South Viet-Nam

was in the process of growing stronger and stronger. "You help us so we can take over more and more." The process of growing stronger could have the effect of weakening the other side; and if they do not accept a political solution, it is clear that we ourselves will have to do more.

President Thieu said there seemed to him to be two alternatives, either for the U.S. to speed up the war or to help the GVN to take over more of the war burden. He felt that the statements which the President had made during his trip indicated the latter course, i.e., that Asians should take over more responsibility for their own security. President Thieu felt that this was a constructive policy and that if the U.S. wishes to disengage, the best course is to help South Viet-Nam grow strong. He added that if you help us to resist and "chase away the aggressor," we can handle the rest of the problem.

The President repeated that we intend to continue our aid which we believe is important in developing the Vietnamese economy and in the effort to Vietnamize the war, both for the effect that this has in Viet-Nam and in the United States. The President added that he felt American opinion would be favorably influenced by President Thieu's efforts to broaden the base of his government.

President Thieu said he proposed to go ahead with his plans and remarked that one of the problems he had had during the last two weeks was how to hold back the super-hawks and to keep the super-doves from going too far.

President Thieu said that there are risks in the "long haul, low cost" solution because the people do not yet have confidence in our ability to oppose the communists politically. Therefore, we have to have time to convince the people that we have the means to win politically. We must also convince the communists of the need to negotiate.

President Nixon asked President Thieu's judgment as to how to go about this. Should we make it clear to the other side we are not going to quit? Thieu replied in the affirmative.

The President asked President Thieu his view of why the enemy did not attempt another high point militarily in July.

President Thieu replied that the enemy is preparing for another try, they had not been able to get ready for an effort in July, but that they would try again. Thieu remarked that the enemy problem is to maintain the war at a level which will not discourage or prevent further reduction in U.S. forces, but at the same time to try to discredit the ability of the Vietnamese forces.

President Nixon remarked that going to Paris bought the enemy time and this had been expensive for us.

President Thieu asked what we should now do in Paris, and the President replied that he felt that we should sit tight for the next two

or three months. President Thieu agreed and said that the Vietnamese understand too that we must be forthcoming toward the negotiations.

The discussion then turned to the question of troop reduction. The President said he felt that no statement should be made about the next increment now; that this would give the impression that his visit had been used to put pressure on the GVN.

President Thieu responded that it would be helpful to do this in a way which would indicate to the Vietnamese people that the reductions will be gradual. He believed also that we should exploit the fact of withdrawals indicating that while we were making constructive moves, the communists were doing nothing. He felt also that it was important to develop a plan for further U.S. reductions in 1970 in which the U.S. would say we will withdraw X numbers of troops and GVN would say the same thing. It was important that the reductions should not appear to be sudden improvisations responding to some particular influence.

The President replied that he thought it was well to have a plan, but it should never be discussed publicly. We should not disclose to the enemy what we propose to do, but keep them guessing. Another disadvantage in making public disclosures ahead of time is the fact that critics at home will not be satisfied with whatever numbers we come up with. They will continue to snipe at us and say we are not doing enough. Consequently, let us have a plan, but let us keep it secret among ourselves. The President referred to his remarks at his press conference on June 19 about Clark Clifford's formula to the effect that he hoped we might do better.<sup>2</sup> He explained that what he had in mind, though he could not say so publicly, was that Clifford's formula was not optimistic enough if we issue a warning to the enemy and then have to act on it.

The President asked President Thieu about the prospects for his land reform program. Thieu replied that the draft law had been submitted to the Assembly, which was now in recess. The Assembly would, however, meet in mid-August and he hoped that it might enact the law by the end of August.

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<sup>2</sup> On June 19 President Nixon held a news conference at the White House during which he was asked to respond to a suggestion put forth by former Secretary of Defense Clifford that 100,000 American troops ought to be withdrawn by the end of 1969 and that all ground troops ought to be out by the end of 1970. In response, President Nixon said, "I would hope that we could beat Mr. Clifford's timetable, just as I think we have done a little better than he did when he was in charge of our national defense." (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1969*, pp. 471–472) Kissinger recalls in *White House Years*, "Though strenuous efforts were made to 'interpret' the President's remark, the damage was done; our insistence on mutual withdrawal was by then drained of virtually any plausibility." (pp. 274–275)

The President said that he had recently read a report that the VC were coming more under Chinese influence and asked whether President Thieu felt they had any separate identity from Hanoi.

President Thieu responded that he felt Hanoi had played the game as between Moscow and Peking very cleverly. They had not long ago issued a statement saying they were neither pro-Moscow nor pro-Peking. The fact is that they continue to receive help and need it from both the Soviets and Communist Chinese. There are two factions in Hanoi—pro-war and pro-negotiation. They use both in a skillful way to ingratiate themselves with both the Soviets and the Chinese, the pro-negotiation faction with Moscow and the pro-war faction with Peking.

President Thieu went on to say that after the war North Viet-Nam will attempt to maintain groupings both in Cambodia and Laos. He added that “we never forget the ultimate purpose of the Chinese. North Viet-Nam also nourishes and will continue to nourish the purpose and objective of imposing communism on the South. They will accept a temporary division, as they did in 1954, but they will not relinquish their purpose.”

The President asked President Thieu whether, if the North stays out of South Viet-Nam, they can handle the VC. He replied, “Yes, I believe we can. But we cannot imagine a permanent peace if North Viet-Nam remains in Laos and Cambodia. It is not possible to have an international body which can control one-thousand miles of border. Therefore, it is important that in a settlement Laos and Cambodia should be included and that controls should be set up in both these countries as well as South Viet-Nam.

The President said he was concerned about the deteriorating situation in Laos and asked Thieu what he felt we could do to be more effective. Thieu replied that he felt one measure we could take was to increase the bombing.

The President asked for his views of Sihanouk. President Thieu replied that while Sihanouk is bad, we don’t want to have something worse. He added that there are only two groups in Cambodia who can overthrow Sihanouk, the military or the communists; the military are weak and ineffectual and it is more likely to be the communists who would succeed. Even if the military moved against Sihanouk, he felt that the communists would eventually take over. What Sihanouk does or can do depends very largely on what happens in Viet-Nam. Cambodia is a weak country and if Sihanouk were overthrown, or if we encouraged his overthrow, it is highly likely the communists will take over.

When the President asked whether President Thieu felt the communists were a great danger to Sihanouk, he said he believed so. He thought that Sihanouk wants Cambodia to play a neutral role, but that

he may not be able to maintain this if the communists gain or even largely increase their control.

At this point the Vice President entered the conversation and Dr. Kissinger and Ambassador Bunker withdrew.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> While this group was meeting, a second group of “Advisers”—Berger, Green, Abrams, South Vietnam’s Deputy Prime Minister Khiem and Defense Minister Vy—met and discussed the significance of the lull, Vietnamization, and the American public’s attitude towards the war. Nixon, Thieu, Ky, Kissinger, Bunker, and Nguyen Phu Duc joined the meeting after their discussion ended. Nixon briefed the advisers on his discussions with Thieu and Ky and then gave them a “pep talk.” (Memorandum from Holdridge to Kissinger, July 31; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1320, Unfiled Material, 8 of 19)

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## 104. Memorandum of Conversation<sup>1</sup>

Paris, August 4, 1969.

### PARTICIPANTS

Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge  
Phillip Habib  
Henry A. Kissinger  
William A.K. Lake

Mr. Kissinger outlined the President’s view that we have made as many unilateral concessions as we are going to.

Mr. Habib agreed that Thieu need make no more moves unless there is “significant movement” by the other side. Habib said he thought that the situation in the negotiations is now like that of last June–August, when the other side was simply marking time before moving in the fall. He said that we have to show them how to be forthcoming.

Mr. Kissinger said that, with regard to withdrawals, we must have a clearcut assurance that once withdrawn, North Vietnamese are not coming back—an unambiguous verification process. A written document per se is not necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 106, Country Files, Far East, Vietnam, “S” Mister, Vol. 1. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

Mr. Kissinger stated that the President had said in response to questions from Ceausescu<sup>2</sup> that we would not accept the formation of a *negotiated* coalition government or a *unilateral* withdrawal of forces. He was flat on this.

Mr. Habib said that they had not yet used their authority to offer to pass messages on a political settlement from the other side to the GVN. They might use it later. Mr. Kissinger did not object, but asked that if done, it be done coldly and precisely.

Mr. Habib said that the North Vietnamese had not yet gotten the message on our position, but he thinks they are getting it. Mr. Kissinger said that if they make it “Nixon’s War,” he may try to win it. He does not want to see Communist troops in Saigon.

In response to Mr. Habib’s question, Mr. Kissinger said we should not yet indicate we have nothing more to say. But we should shut off their endless speeches about our sincerity and avoid being placed on the defensive. The key is to convince them that the framework is not to be changed.

Ambassador Lodge said that they will never agree to really free elections, and we shall therefore never see them. But we may get a mixed commission of some sort. Mr. Kissinger said he did not expect to see elections either. There will be no winner-take-all solution.

Mr. Habib agreed that we must convince them that the President can’t hold still after November 1.

Mr. Kaplan and General Weyand<sup>3</sup> joined the conversation at this point. Mr. Kissinger said that Kaplan should hit hard the theme of “no more unilateral concessions” in his dealings with the press.

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<sup>2</sup> Reference is to questions asked by President Nicolae Ceausescu of Nixon during a discussion on Vietnam at a meeting in Bucharest, Romania, August 3. A memorandum of discussion of that meeting is printed in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, Vol. XLI.

<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant General Frederick C. Weyand, Military Adviser to the U.S. Paris Peace Delegation, and Harold Kaplan, the delegation’s press spokesman.

**105. Notes of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, August 5, 1969, 6:50 p.m.

[Omitted here is brief discussion unrelated to the Kissinger–Xuan Thuy conversation.]

K said he wanted to give P brief rundown on his talk—spent 3 and a half hours with their Chief negotiator.<sup>2</sup> K said it was at Sainteny's home and there four of them present—including interpreter and note taker. K said he made presentation along line he had shown to P on plane and similar to what P said to Ceausescu.<sup>3</sup> K said he laid down deadline on them very hard. K said they asked 8 clarifying questions and then launched into usual line. K said he told them if they had nothing new to say, they were speaking in wrong forum and he would leave. K said in every case when he got tough, he moved back. He indicated he was extremely eager to talk again but had no authority yet and wanted to go back to Hanoi. K said he is writing long report now. K said one of his assistants who was present feels this was most conciliatory they have ever been. K said while none of this proves anything before he would have said the chances were one in ten and now he thinks they are one in four or three that this thing will work. P asked what will happen. K said one interesting thing was they said when they want to get in touch again they would prefer to get in touch thru Walters rather than Sainteny. K said they had number of modifications in their negotiating position, but it is not enough for us yet. P said this movement has not been made to Lodge and K said right. He saw Habib right after meeting and K is sure of that. P said not to tell them a thing about it. K said he just went over positions and in abstract way said let me understand position exactly. K said they tried to draw him into discussion about ten points and K told them these are ten points and not ten commandments and we will not talk about them as only basis for solution. K said he told them it is their turn to make proposal now, etc. K said he told them toward end of this year will face another test of strength. K said every time he did that, other side pulled back. P said it looks to him as though they will try to diddle us along, but this also proves that Lodge has not been tough enough. K said he told them Pres will not withdraw troops unilaterally and will not replace Thieu—

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 360, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File, Aug. 1969. No classification marking.

<sup>2</sup> With Xuan Thuy; see Document 106 for the formal report to the President.

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2, Document 104.



this will not happen and they have to face as fact of life. K said they will get Romanian report shortly.<sup>4</sup> K said if we do not hear within four weeks or there is no movement at Paris. Pres interrupted to ask K what his guess is—will they want to talk to K again. K said he suggested that they do normal negotiation in Paris and if they reach point where they want to tell us something quite new, they get in touch with K. K said he told them he did not want to come over there to hear the same old thing. P said he agreed completely with this. K said if they get in touch and ask to see him it would be the first time in 18 months that they have asked to see us—the other meetings have been at our request. P said he wants Lodge instructed to that effect and to stop begging. K said he told Lodge of change P had made in Saigon statement<sup>5</sup>—also that P has said he has gone as far as he can go.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to the Kissinger–Xuan Thuy conversation. Kissinger briefed the President on his talks with Pompidou who agreed that there would be no further concessions on Vietnam and offered to arrange for contacts with the North Vietnamese, if required. The President and Kissinger agreed that if the story about the Kissinger–Xuan Thuy meeting broke, they would say that Kissinger had dinner with Sainteny, the North Vietnamese were present, and they had a “social chat.” Both Kissinger and Nixon also agreed not to tell Laird about the meeting in Paris.]

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<sup>4</sup> Apparently a Romanian report of the Kissinger–Xuan Thuy conversation, not further identified.

<sup>5</sup> Apparent reference to a change in Nixon’s statement on arrival at Saigon on July 30. The text of the statement is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1969*, pp. 584–585.

**106. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, August 6, 1969.

SUBJECT

Meeting in Paris with North Vietnamese<sup>2</sup>

Attached is the full account of my conversation at Paris with Xuan Thuy and Mai Van Bo.

The following points seem to me to be of particular significance:

—Xuan Thuy did not hit back hard at my statements about the necessity for us to take actions of gravest consequence if there is not major progress by November 1. He did say that if we do not agree to a solution on the basis of the NLF ten points, they will have no choice but to continue to fight. But he did not press this point strongly.

—Although he “explained” the ten points to me, he did not do so very aggressively. He stated that he did not regard them as the “ten commandments” after I said that we did not so regard them.

—Xuan Thuy indicated a desire to see me again, “if we can make progress.”

—The meeting was business-like and serious, but conducted in a fairly easy atmosphere.

—Xuan Thuy emphasized the question of troop withdrawals and political settlement, calling for unconditional U.S. withdrawal and on the removal of Thieu, Ky and Huong. He also expressed particular interest in our views on neutralization. He said that they wanted the North to be socialist, among other things, and the South to be democratic. This distinction may not mean anything but is nonetheless noteworthy.

—Xuan Thuy for the first time hinted at some linkage between the withdrawal of our forces and theirs (points two and three of their ten points). While he was vague on specifics, the message was clear and significant.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 863, For the President's File, Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David Memcons, 1969–1970. Top Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. The memorandum is not initialed by Kissinger.

<sup>2</sup> The decision for Kissinger to meet with Xuan Thuy in Paris was part of the initiative with Sainteny; see Document 97. Initially Nixon and Kissinger wanted Sainteny to travel to Hanoi on their behalf to deliver Nixon's letter (see footnote 4, Document 97), but the North Vietnamese would not give Sainteny a visa and the letter was delivered to Mai Van Bo in Paris instead. Nixon and Kissinger then asked Sainteny to arrange a meeting between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho. Kissinger met Xuan Thuy instead since Le Duc Tho left Paris for Hanoi. (Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 277–278)

—He emphasized their desire for good relations—including technical, economic and cultural relations—between us once peace is achieved and reconstruction began.

—He preferred General Walters over Sainteny as a contact point.

## **Attachment**

### **Memorandum of Conversation**

Paris, August 4, 1969.

#### **PARTICIPANTS**

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger  
Major General Vernon Walters  
Mr. William A.K. Lake  
  
Xuan Thuy  
Mai Van Bo  
Vietnamese Notetaker  
Vietnamese Interpreter

Dr. Kissinger opened the conversation by saying that he appreciated the opportunity of seeing Mr. Xuan Thuy and to be able to have direct discussions. He had known Mai Van Bo since 1967. He had always found him to show great diplomatic skill and subtlety. Dr. Kissinger said he would like to say a personal word before getting into the matter which had brought him there. He had been concerned with peace in Vietnam since 1965. Anyone who has followed Vietnamese history, particularly the events of the last five years, must be aware of the courage and dignity of the Vietnamese people. He was fully aware that after all that had happened, there was a great amount of distrust between our two peoples. But any discussions will be conducted on our side with respect for the courage and dignity of the Vietnamese people. He wondered whether there had been any answer to the letter from our President which had been delivered in Paris two weeks before. Xuan Thuy said that President Nixon's letter had been forwarded to Hanoi. It was not dated. Dr. Kissinger said the letter had actually been written three days before it had been delivered. Perhaps he should say a few things which President Nixon had asked him personally to convey.

Dr. Kissinger said that Washington had read with great care the statements that had been made at the plenary sessions and in the private meetings. Hanoi had often questioned our good will and our sincerity. It was hard for us to judge whether they did this for psychological effect or to what degree they really believed this. Dr. Kissinger said that he was there to tell them that we sincerely wanted peace and were approaching it with an attitude of good will, but he was also there to tell them how the situation appeared to us.

On November 1, 1969, the negotiations which led to the end of the bombing would be one year old. During this period, the U.S. had made what we consider to be significant moves. We had ended reinforcements, we had a partial bombing halt, then a total bombing halt, and the withdrawal of 25,000 combat forces. We had offered to accept the result of free elections. To us it looks as if there had been no significant response. It is in the long term intolerable for us to be treated at every discussion like school boys who are taking an examination in the ten points of the NLF. We were willing to discuss their ten points but we also wanted a discussion of the proposals our side had made. Therefore, he was here to suggest to them from the highest possible level and in all sincerity that we attempt to make another effort to settle this conflict by the time the bombing halt is one year old—that is to say, by the 1st of November. As part of this effort, we would like to answer some of the questions which had been put to us by their side on various occasions. (Dr. Kissinger commented here that he was reading from notes which had been approved personally by the President):

—The United States is willing to withdraw all of its forces without exception from Vietnam as part of a program for the removal of all outside forces from Vietnam.

—The United States is prepared to accept any outcome of a free political process. In defining the political process, he would like to set forth a few propositions:

a. We realize that neither side can be expected to give up at the conference table what had not been conceded on the battlefield.

b. We believe that a fair political process must register the existing relationship of political forces.

c. We realize that we will differ with them on how to achieve this but neither side should be asked to accept the proposition that it can be defeated without noticing it. We are not asking them to disband the organized Communist forces and they should not ask us to disband the organized non-Communist forces.

—We remain prepared, as we had said, to discuss the ten points together with our own points. In order to show our good will in the period between now and November 1, we will withdraw somewhat larger forces than we have already withdrawn and reduce our B-52 and tactical air operations by 10%.

In order to expedite negotiations, the President is ready to open another channel of contact with them. He is prepared to appoint a high-level emissary who would be authorized to negotiate a conclusion. This special contact makes sense only if negotiations are serious. If this contact takes place, the President is prepared to adjust military operations in order to facilitate the negotiations. If the objective was sufficiently serious and the conclusion sufficiently imminent, the President is prepared to ask Dr. Kissinger to conduct the discussions.

At the same time, Dr. Kissinger had been asked to tell them in all solemnity that if by November 1, no major progress has been made toward a solution, we will be compelled—with great reluctance—to take measures of the greatest consequences.

We had noticed that in their propaganda and in the Paris discussions, they were attempting to make this “Mr. Nixon’s War.” We did not believe that this was in their interest. If it is Mr. Nixon’s War, he cannot afford not to win it. Dr. Kissinger then said, “you are a courageous, indeed a heroic people,” and no one knows what the final result would be of such a sequence of events. We believe that such a tragic conflict to test each other can be avoided.

He wished to conclude with the same statement with which he began. If there are serious discussions we will make every effort to treat Hanoi with the respect and courtesy to which their sacrifices entitle them. In fairness and respect he must tell them that we cannot continue to accept the procedures that have characterized our contacts in the last 15 months after November 1. He also hoped that when we looked back on this conversation, we would consider it a turning point toward peace and reconciliation between our two peoples.

Xuan Thuy then asked whether Dr. Kissinger had finished, as he would like to ask a few questions for clarification. Dr. Kissinger said, “Please do,” and noted that he had read Xuan Thuy’s questions at the negotiations and they were always acute.

Xuan Thuy then said, “you say that between now and November 1, all problems will be settled, but at the same time, you say that from now to November 1, U.S. will withdraw troops in greater numbers than the 25,000 already withdrawn. What is the meaning of these two propositions?”

Dr. Kissinger replied that this was a sign of our good will and sincerity. But we would make no further concessions. Xuan Thuy said that he did not clearly understand. Dr. Kissinger then said that he had not said that all troops must be out by November 1 but that there must be an understanding by which it is clear *when* all troops will be out.

Xuan Thuy then asked whether he understood rightly that between now and November 1 the U.S. would withdraw more troops in a greater number than the 25,000. That is one question. Another is whether from now on there are meetings and discussions for settling these matters.

Dr. Kissinger said that we proposed between now and November 1 that we agree to make a serious major effort to agree on all essential matters. (We then propose that on issues of great consequence or issues of principle he would be prepared to come to Paris or any other place on weekends to discuss outstanding problems. This would not happen unless the issues were serious. (As Xuan Thuy did not appear

to have clearly understood, Dr. Kissinger repeated the statement.)) He then continued that we were proposing this so that before history and our conscience we could say that we had done everything possible to avoid what we must otherwise do. (Xuan Thuy smiled without mirth, and consulted Mai Van Bo.)

Xuan Thuy then asked if he might ask another question. “Do you mean that the Four Party Conference should go on as now and that besides this there be other discussions between the DRV and the US only?”

Dr. Kissinger replied that we now have the plenary discussions on Ave. Kleber in which the speeches made are not distinguished by their novelty. (Xuan Thuy smiled.) We have private discussions on the Ambassadorial level and we have started technical discussions between Habib and Ha Van Lau. If any one of these prove useful, they should be continued. If they believed that the existing forums lend themselves to a solution, we have no interest in complicating the situation. If it should prove possible to avoid repetition of some of the speeches released by both sides, we would be prepared to open another forum provided this promised to achieve a rapid solution on issues of great importance. As for his own participation, his other duties did not permit him to spend considerable time on negotiations in which issues were not clearly defined. The technical execution could be carried out in existing forums. His participation would have to remain secret and on some occasions, because of his other responsibilities, he would be replaced by someone who would have the full confidence of the President himself.

Xuan Thuy said that Dr. Kissinger had referred to the neutralization of Vietnam and he would like to understand further what was meant.

Dr. Kissinger said that Xuan Thuy had raised this question with Sainteny when they had met previously. He simply wanted to say that we agreed with it in principle, and were prepared to discuss it. But we did not think that this was the occasion for negotiations on it. In any event, he could tell them that we do not intend to maintain bases in Vietnam.

Xuan Thuy said that Dr. Kissinger had referred to negotiations “at the highest level”. Dr. Kissinger reiterated that he was speaking *on behalf* of the highest U.S. level. He could also say that we would be prepared to send an emissary to meet for example with their Foreign Minister, or Prime Minister, provided that there was some assurance that this would lead to a rapid conclusion. At this point it would probably be best to narrow the issues of disagreement on major issues by existing procedures he had outlined.

Xuan Thuy then asked whether he might express his views. He said that he had up to now listened very attentively to Dr. Kissinger.

He would like to have an exchange of views in a very straightforward and realistic way so that they could better understand each other's views, so as to contribute to a correct and rapid settlement of the Vietnamese problem. Vietnam is far from the U.S., more than 10,000 miles away. Vietnam had done no harm to the U.S. The U.S. Government in the past had intervened in the Vietnamese problem and had set up the administration of Ngo Dinh Diem and successive administrations in South Vietnam. Then the U.S. had brought in its advisers, military personnel and war-making units of U.S. combat troops. There was a half million U.S. troops in South Vietnam. In the meantime, the U.S. had launched a war of destruction against the DRV with its air and naval forces, thus creating a great deal of suffering for people in both South and North Vietnam. The Vietnamese people had been forced to fight against this intervention and aggression to defend their existence and the sacred rights of their fatherland. Dr. Kissinger had studied the history of their people and knew that the Vietnamese people had an age old history and that their history was characterized by struggles against foreign aggression. The Vietnamese people in this fight for the defense of their independence, freedom and peace had been united in rising against foreign aggression. They had never been subdued by any power or deception. Over the past 25 years the people had been continuously fighting for their just cause. What did they want? Nothing but their independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. These were recognized by the 1954 Geneva Agreements. Now in view of the special circumstances in Vietnam, they wanted the North to be independent, to live in peace and to be socialist. For South Vietnam, they wanted an independent, democratic, neutral, peaceful life. They understood a neutral South Vietnam to be a SVN without foreign troops, without military bases, without being involved in any way in any military alliance, without being under the protection of any military bloc. The reunification of Vietnam would be carried out step by step, by peaceful means and by mutual agreement between the two zones.

With regard to Laos, Xuan Thuy said they recognize the peaceful, independent sovereignty of Laos and the Geneva Agreements of 1962 on Laos. On Cambodia they recognize the peaceful sovereignty and territorial integrity of Cambodia in its present boundaries. They want to live in friendship and peace with all nations over the whole world. They wanted broad relations—economic, cultural, technical—with all nations. In a word, they want peace, not war. They had been actually compelled to fight by the American authorities and they want peace—but not peace at any price, peace with independence and freedom. He had several times told Ambassador Cabot Lodge that the NLF had presented its 10 points and that they approved them for an overall solution as they were logical and reasonable. If the 10 points were now taken as a basis, the war could come to a prompt and rapid solution.

If the war goes on, or is expanded, they would be forced to continue fighting in order to reach their objectives. They had sufficient determination to do so but they were also rich in goodwill.

Now, asked Xuan Thuy, how can the Vietnam problem be settled? There are two basic questions. The first question is the total withdrawal of all US forces and of the forces of their camp from South Vietnam. They agreed to the proposals set down—the 10 points—that is, all US troops must withdraw from South Vietnam without conditions.

Dr. Kissinger asked if he might interrupt on this point. He would comment on Xuan Thuy's exposé after he finished. If he might make a specific point and he would like Walters to repeat it in French, it was this: we were willing to discuss the 10 points, but we do not regard the 10 points as the Ten Commandments. On the matter of unconditional withdrawal he must tell them that he would not quarrel about the word unconditional. But they knew and we knew that there must be a *quid pro quo* for American withdrawal, a unilateral pull-out was out of the question. He was not there to argue phrases, but since we are speaking here in private, there must be a clear relationship between our withdrawals and theirs. They must understand this and not have any illusions.

Xuan Thuy replied that each side understands this matter in its own way. He did not understand that the 10 points were the Ten Commandments or the Bible but that the 10 points in view of the situation in Vietnam were logical and realistic. Therefore, he felt it necessary to explain that in the 10 points there were points 2 and 3. This Dr. Kissinger knew. (Dr. Kissinger said that he knew the 10 points but not as well as Xuan Thuy, who smiled.) Point 2 dealt with the armed forces of the US and other foreign countries in South Vietnam. These are the only foreign forces in South Vietnam. As for Point 3, it deals with Vietnamese armed forces in South Vietnam. This question will be settled by the Vietnamese parties among themselves. Points 2 and 3 belonged together. In the eight points of President Nixon, in the points dealing with the withdrawal of U.S. and allied troops, it is pointed out that some troops withdraw in twelve months; on the remaining troops, one doesn't know when. If the U.S. sets a time limit of twelve months for some and the remainder without time limit, then it looks as if the U.S. doesn't want to withdraw its troops completely.

Xuan Thuy referred to Dr. Kissinger's statement that the U.S. is prepared to withdraw all troops in South Vietnam and intends to maintain no bases. He took notes of this statement. But now he must ask about President Nixon's speech—why could the U.S. bring its troops in so quickly, but need so long to withdraw them. Why not do so in say five or six months?

Dr. Kissinger asked if he could interrupt. Xuan Thuy said he preferred to finish.



Now, Xuan Thuy continued, Mr. Advisor Kissinger says the U.S. has withdrawn 25,000 troops. Thuy had repeatedly commented that this 25,000 number is insignificant in comparison with the 540,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam. Even if another 25,000 or more were now withdrawn, it would still be insignificant. Therefore, Xuan Thuy had often said that the U.S. wants to carry out troop withdrawal in dribbles, and wants to prolong its military occupation of South Vietnam. It has created doubt in their minds about the intentions of the U.S.

The second fundamental problem, Xuan Thuy continued, is the political regime in South Vietnam, the elections in South Vietnam. In the eight points of President Nixon this question is dealt with only superficially; they just say it will be settled by the Vietnamese themselves. They also say the U.S. is prepared to accept any result of elections. But the important question is: who will organize the elections? President Nixon said that the present Saigon administration is legal and constitutional, and that the present administration therefore has the right to organize elections. That is why President Nixon has agreed to the propositions of Nguyen van Thieu. Xuan Thuy said he thought that if they were really having a straightforward, real, frank discussion, one should not express himself in such a way. How can one say that the Saigon administration is legal and constitutional? It is well known to all the peoples of the world that the present Thieu–Ky–Huong administration, he said, is a warlike, dictatorial administration which oppressed anyone who speaks of coalition, neutrality or democratic liberties. If the Thieu–Ky–Huong administration remains as now, it would be difficult to settle the Vietnam problem.

Xuan Thuy added that he thought that Thieu–Ky–Huong must be changed (i.e. removed—trans.); they would consider the *remaining* administration as a reality, but this administration should change its policy and stand for peace, independence and neutrality. In their view—as mentioned in the 10 points—it is logical and reasonable to form a provisional government to hold elections. This is because the realities show on the one hand the PRG, on the other hand the Saigon administration. In addition there are other political forces. If the Saigon administration organizes the elections, then the PRG will not agree. If the PRG organizes the elections, then the Saigon administration does not agree. Therefore a provisional coalition government, composed of the PRG and the remainder of the Saigon government which is for peace, independence and neutrality, should organize the elections—then this is reasonable.

Xuan Thuy believed that if now these two key questions are settled, then peace will be rapidly restored. After the restoration of peace, Vietnam—both South and North—will begin the rebuilding of a new life. Xuan Thuy was sure that in this reconstruction they would establish relations—technical, commercial, economic, cultural—with all

countries, and that they would establish good relations and friendship with the US.

Xuan Thuy then said he was prepared to exchange views with Dr. Kissinger.

Dr. Kissinger replied that he appreciated what Xuan Thuy had said. He would like first to ask two clarifying questions.

Was Xuan Thuy saying that Thieu, Ky and Huong must be replaced before *any* new political construction, i.e. new political solution?

Xuan Thuy responded that the U.S. now says the PRG should hold talks with the Saigon administration. But the PRG says that the Thieu–Ky–Huong administration is warlike. They oppress anyone who speaks of coalition; therefore, if they were to talk to the Saigon administration, no settlement could be achieved. President Nixon had recently visited Saigon, he continued, to quiet this administration because it is torn by internal strife. This proves it has no popular support. This will create more problems for the U.S., including problems in Paris. That, he said, is why the PRG demands that Thieu–Ky–Huong be removed and the remaining administration change its policies to peace, independence and neutrality. The remaining administration could talk to the PRG.

Dr. Kissinger asked if he could put a second question to Xuan Thuy, one which was not perhaps polite but was asked in the spirit of frankness of this talk.

Xuan Thuy, he said, who had spent a long time in these negotiations, knew all the nuances. He did not. He therefore wondered whether in this meeting Xuan Thuy had said anything which was not already said at Avenue Kleber or in the private talks? If so, what was it?

Xuan Thuy said that the difference was that he had expanded for Dr. Kissinger's better comprehension on *how* U.S. troops must be withdrawn and how a provision coalition government should be organized. It is not the PRG which must organize it. This is the proposition of the PRG—and this proposition is logical and reasonable.

Dr. Kissinger asked if he were to understand that in this provisional coalition government, the PRG is to be represented together with what is left of the Saigon government.

Xuan Thuy said he would clarify: on the one hand, it is the PRG; on the other, the remainder of the Saigon administration which would have changed its policies and would stand for peace, neutrality and independence. These two would form the provisional coalition government.

Dr. Kissinger said he understood. He thought he should sum up a few things.

First, with respect to troop withdrawals—We have stated that we will withdraw our troops after a settlement. It is useless to discuss

whether we are serious. If they wish to know this, they should discuss it seriously. They could regulate our withdrawals by the speed of their own. If they did not wish to have U.S. and DRV troops treated as comparable, we could negotiate some correspondence. But there would be no withdrawal of U.S. forces without the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces. We do not insist on keeping U.S. forces in Vietnam after others are withdrawn. He could say on the highest authority that we seek no U.S. bases in Vietnam.

Secondly, Dr. Kissinger said he must tell Xuan Thuy, so he would not be misled or confused by people who visited him, that we will *not* replace Thieu, Ky or Huong any more than we ask them to replace any individuals in the PRG.

At the same time, he wanted to repeat what he had said earlier: any settlement must reflect the existing balance of political forces. We have no intention of humiliating anyone.

As he had understood Xuan Thuy's exposition, and as he had expounded also, there are two problems. One has to do with the withdrawal of forces, the other with a political solution. Xuan Thuy believes we have not been sufficiently precise on the issue of withdrawal. We believe they have been too precise on the question of a political solution. (Xuan Thuy laughed.) If we are to complete the major part of our work by November 1, we should stop talking about points and start talking about the problems. He believed they understood what we have in mind with respect to the withdrawal of forces. It remains therefore a question of finding some formula for establishing a relation between their forces and our forces.

The problem is of course much more complicated, Dr. Kissinger added, and this meeting is not the occasion to solve it. It must be done on the basis of recognition of the realities in South Vietnam—of the government in Saigon and of other political forces. With this accepted, we will work to find a solution reflecting the true wishes of the people of South Vietnam. We have too much respect for Xuan Thuy to believe that we could trick him into a solution which does not respect their dignity. But they cannot impose a dishonorable solution on us.

Dr. Kissinger suggested that they think over this conversation in this spirit. There are many ways of approaching a solution. They can speed up the work that goes on in existing forums, and they can be assured that it will be noticed in Washington. The President and he—Kissinger—read very carefully all that is said in Paris. If a very important issue is reached or there is something they wished to convey to the President but don't wish to say in a forum where too many people would know, he could arrange to be informed through Mr. Sainteny or General Walters, who remains in Paris. But it must be an important matter capable of being brought to a conclusion.

Xuan Thuy asked whether General Walters was present at the meeting. Dr. Kissinger said that he is our Defense Attaché at Paris. He was General Eisenhower's interpreter and is an acquaintance of President Nixon. He cannot discuss, but can take information, Dr. Kissinger said.

Xuan Thuy asked for his address. Dr. Kissinger promised it to him later. (At the end of the meeting, General Walters gave Mai Van Bo his telephone numbers at home and at the office.)

Dr. Kissinger wished to say one other thing. When he was a professor, he had started out with problems of philosophy and art. He recognized that the most difficult problems are not where good people meet evil people, but are where two strong people with strong convictions confront each other. (Xuan Thuy smiled.) We would prefer to have the Vietnamese as friends rather than as enemies, Dr. Kissinger continued. He was talking to Xuan Thuy so that at the end of the year—that is, after November 1—our two peoples who have no fundamental disagreement with each other, should not once again need to test each other's resolution. He believed that we must make an effort to find a solution between now and November 1.

Dr. Kissinger then said he had one practical problem to raise. Did they prefer Sainteny or General Walters as a means to communicate with him (Kissinger)? Or maybe not at all? Xuan Thuy said if he had anything to convey, he would say it to General Walters. Dr. Kissinger reiterated that General Walters cannot discuss; he can only take messages for Dr. Kissinger.

Xuan Thuy asked if Dr. Kissinger were finished. When told yes, Xuan Thuy said Dr. Kissinger had stated that the U.S. had just partially, then totally stopped the bombing, and had then withdrawn 25,000 troops. Dr. Kissinger had said this showed goodwill. But he had added that he had found no goodwill by the DRV. This was not true. The DRV rather had responded with great goodwill. Originally they demanded that the bombing be totally stopped before talks. But the U.S. only partially stopped it, and they had talked. Then, when the U.S. had stopped the bombing, we had said we would talk on November 6. But we didn't, and the conference only started two months later.

At the conference, Xuan Thuy continued, they have put forward their four points, the NLF five points, and now there are the overall ten points. The U.S. has its eight points and Saigon has proposed a number of things. But one must say that our plans of settlement—the eight points and Saigon's proposals—are not comprehensive at all.

The reason why the DRV agrees to the ten points of the NLF is that this overall solution is logical, reasonable and fair. It points out how military, political and other problems can be settled.

Dr. Kissinger noted that it has only one defect—we don't agree with it. Xuan Thuy smiled.

Xuan Thuy said there is a contradiction in our ideas. On the one hand, there is the rapid withdrawal of US and other countries' troops from Vietnam and an end to the war. (Dr. Kissinger interjected "and DRV" after "troops" in the preceding sentence.) On the other hand, Xuan Thuy said, we wish to consolidate the puppet government. How?

Dr. Kissinger said that this is our problem. We are not saying that we insist on any particular government being maintained after a settlement. But we will not—because it is beyond our power and for other reasons—replace Thieu and Ky and Huong. We want the people of South Vietnam to choose their own government after a settlement.

Xuan Thuy said that this is what Ambassador Lodge had told him many times. And he had told Lodge many times what he had said.

Dr. Kissinger said yes, that if this were to be the discussion, there would not be a solution by November 1.

Xuan Thuy said he would like to state that last June he had gone to Hanoi to meet with his government. His government was aware of all the details of the Paris conference and was fully in agreement with the views he had expressed in this meeting. His government had reaffirmed that all the negotiations in Paris on the Vietnam problem are entrusted to him and Le Duc Tho as the men responsible. Therefore he had today listened to Dr. Kissinger's views. He will, he said, report Dr. Kissinger's remarks to his government in Hanoi. He said he was prepared to study Dr. Kissinger's views and at the same time wanted Dr. Kissinger to study his. What he had been saying at the meeting, he felt he had said straightforwardly and frankly.

Xuan Thuy suggested that they thank Mr. Sainteny, their host, who had provided an opportunity for the meeting.

He said that he did wish to meet with Dr. Kissinger again if we can make progress.

Dr. Kissinger then asked Xuan Thuy to keep this discussion in absolute confidence and not to refer to it in other discussions which were taking place or to speak of it to anyone else.

Xuan Thuy agreed and added that when the private discussions became known it was not through them and if there were a leak it was in Washington. Dr. Kissinger said that they were right and this was the first agreement they had reached (humorously). He could assure him that this discussion would not leak from Washington.

Dr. Kissinger said that now that they had finished the formal discussion he would like to say something as a former professor who had studied diplomatic history. He could appreciate a good negotiator. If he understood what Xuan Thuy had said it was to ask for the impossible

and finally to agree to the barely conceivable as a major concession. Xuan Thuy smiled briefly.

Xuan Thuy said that he wanted to explain this to Dr. Kissinger so that he could have a better understanding of the 10 points of the NLF, of which they approved. As he had told Dr. Kissinger at the beginning there were two possibilities. It would be good if both sides could reach agreement on the basis of the 10 points, then a real agreement could be rapidly reached. If this were not possible, then the war could go on but they want the first possibility as peace is much better. If they could discuss and agree on military and political problems a settlement would be prompt. He had once told Ambassador Cabot Lodge that for questions regarding South Vietnam the U.S. should enter talks with the Provisional Revolutionary Government but they had accepted talks between the DRVN and the U.S. because the U.S. wanted them.

Dr. Kissinger said that we appreciated the meeting and he thought that they understood one another. He saw no further progress possible at this meeting. He understood that this was a serious problem for which their people had fought with great courage and on our side, too, we had suffered a great deal. He believed that the essential positions are clear and we would have to see in the next three months whether they were reconcilable. We have indicated a possible way by which this could happen. He wanted to tell Xuan Thuy of the President's sincerity but equally of his determination. He would also like to tell him personally of his respect for him and his people. This will continue whether they found a way to be friends or whether fate forces us into an expanded confrontation.

Xuan Thuy said that their aspirations were for independence and peace, and Dr. Kissinger had said that neither side should humiliate the other side. Ambassador Cabot Lodge had once said to him that they were trying to force the U.S. to surrender. He had told him that he had no such idea. On the contrary, they were continuing to create favorable conditions for the U.S. to withdraw its troops. They had experienced 25 years of war, and therefore their aspirations for peace are real.

Dr. Kissinger then said that he suggested that they think about their discussion and we would watch what goes on at the meetings with great care. If Xuan Thuy thought another such discussion would be helpful he could call General Walters and we would arrange a visit and a meeting place, either there or at some other place. This discussion should be on matters beyond what is being discussed in the normal meetings. If they made a step significantly different from the usual steps they would find that we would meet them with a spirit of good will.

Xuan Thuy said that the same was true for them. But on our side we had only talked about methods for taking a step forward but had not offered any concrete step.

Dr. Kissinger said that President Nixon had made a proposal; we had said that we would recognize a free political process. We had stated propositions. He could not accept that we had made no propositions. We must now see where we must go. He did not want to get into detailed negotiations at this meeting. Dr. Kissinger repeated that if they showed willingness to achieve a reasonable compromise, we would not try to take advantage of them or to humiliate them.

After parting amenities the Vietnamese expressed the desire to leave first without taking leave of Mr. Sainteny as they would thank him when they saw him again.

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### 107. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, August 7, 1969.

SUBJECT

General Wheeler's Assessment of the Soviet Role in The Paris Negotiations

Attached is General Wheeler's assessment of the Soviet role in the Paris negotiations<sup>2</sup> which was sent to me by Mel Laird during your trip.

General Wheeler makes the following points:

—The premise for total cessation of hostile acts against North Vietnam has been violated.

—The Soviet Union has relaxed pressure on North Vietnam.

—Without support given by the Soviet Union, the North Vietnamese military effort would collapse within a few months.

—Immediate diplomatic action should be directed at the Soviet Union to press the North Vietnamese to pursue meaningful negotiations.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 138, Vietnam Country Files, Vol. IX, 8/1/69–8/31/69. Secret; Sensitive. The following handwritten note appears on the memorandum: "ret 8/20 Pres has not seen." On August 12 Kissinger sent Laird a short memorandum that read: "I have shown both your memorandum and the attachment to the President, who agrees with your assessment that General Wheeler has written an illuminating and important report." (Ibid.)

<sup>2</sup> Attached but not printed was CM-4433-69, a July 14 memorandum from Wheeler to Laird.

Mr. Kissinger stated that the President had said in response to questions from Ceausescu<sup>2</sup> that we would not accept the formation of a *negotiated* coalition government or a *unilateral* withdrawal of forces. He was flat on this.

Mr. Habib said that they had not yet used their authority to offer to pass messages on a political settlement from the other side to the GVN. They might use it later. Mr. Kissinger did not object, but asked that if done, it be done coldly and precisely.

Mr. Habib said that the North Vietnamese had not yet gotten the message on our position, but he thinks they are getting it. Mr. Kissinger said that if they make it “Nixon’s War,” he may try to win it. He does not want to see Communist troops in Saigon.

In response to Mr. Habib’s question, Mr. Kissinger said we should not yet indicate we have nothing more to say. But we should shut off their endless speeches about our sincerity and avoid being placed on the defensive. The key is to convince them that the framework is not to be changed.

Ambassador Lodge said that they will never agree to really free elections, and we shall therefore never see them. But we may get a mixed commission of some sort. Mr. Kissinger said he did not expect to see elections either. There will be no winner-take-all solution.

Mr. Habib agreed that we must convince them that the President can’t hold still after November 1.

Mr. Kaplan and General Weyand<sup>3</sup> joined the conversation at this point. Mr. Kissinger said that Kaplan should hit hard the theme of “no more unilateral concessions” in his dealings with the press.

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<sup>2</sup> Reference is to questions asked by President Nicolae Ceausescu of Nixon during a discussion on Vietnam at a meeting in Bucharest, Romania, August 3. A memorandum of discussion of that meeting is printed in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, Vol. XLI.

<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant General Frederick C. Weyand, Military Adviser to the U.S. Paris Peace Delegation, and Harold Kaplan, the delegation’s press spokesman.



**105. Notes of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, August 5, 1969, 6:50 p.m.

[Omitted here is brief discussion unrelated to the Kissinger–Xuan Thuy conversation.]

K said he wanted to give P brief rundown on his talk—spent 3 and a half hours with their Chief negotiator.<sup>2</sup> K said it was at Sainteny's home and there four of them present—including interpreter and note taker. K said he made presentation along line he had shown to P on plane and similar to what P said to Ceausescu.<sup>3</sup> K said he laid down deadline on them very hard. K said they asked 8 clarifying questions and then launched into usual line. K said he told them if they had nothing new to say, they were speaking in wrong forum and he would leave. K said in every case when he got tough, he moved back. He indicated he was extremely eager to talk again but had no authority yet and wanted to go back to Hanoi. K said he is writing long report now. K said one of his assistants who was present feels this was most conciliatory they have ever been. K said while none of this proves anything before he would have said the chances were one in ten and now he thinks they are one in four or three that this thing will work. P asked what will happen. K said one interesting thing was they said when they want to get in touch again they would prefer to get in touch thru Walters rather than Sainteny. K said they had number of modifications in their negotiating position, but it is not enough for us yet. P said this movement has not been made to Lodge and K said right. He saw Habib right after meeting and K is sure of that. P said not to tell them a thing about it. K said he just went over positions and in abstract way said let me understand position exactly. K said they tried to draw him into discussion about ten points and K told them these are ten points and not ten commandments and we will not talk about them as only basis for solution. K said he told them it is their turn to make proposal now, etc. K said he told them toward end of this year will face another test of strength. K said every time he did that, other side pulled back. P said it looks to him as though they will try to diddle us along, but this also proves that Lodge has not been tough enough. K said he told them Pres will not withdraw troops unilaterally and will not replace Thieu—

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 360, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File, Aug. 1969. No classification marking.

<sup>2</sup> With Xuan Thuy; see Document 106 for the formal report to the President.

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2, Document 104.

this will not happen and they have to face as fact of life. K said they will get Romanian report shortly.<sup>4</sup> K said if we do not hear within four weeks or there is no movement at Paris. Pres interrupted to ask K what his guess is—will they want to talk to K again. K said he suggested that they do normal negotiation in Paris and if they reach point where they want to tell us something quite new, they get in touch with K. K said he told them he did not want to come over there to hear the same old thing. P said he agreed completely with this. K said if they get in touch and ask to see him it would be the first time in 18 months that they have asked to see us—the other meetings have been at our request. P said he wants Lodge instructed to that effect and to stop begging. K said he told Lodge of change P had made in Saigon statement<sup>5</sup>—also that P has said he has gone as far as he can go.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to the Kissinger–Xuan Thuy conversation. Kissinger briefed the President on his talks with Pompidou who agreed that there would be no further concessions on Vietnam and offered to arrange for contacts with the North Vietnamese, if required. The President and Kissinger agreed that if the story about the Kissinger–Xuan Thuy meeting broke, they would say that Kissinger had dinner with Sainteny, the North Vietnamese were present, and they had a “social chat.” Both Kissinger and Nixon also agreed not to tell Laird about the meeting in Paris.]

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<sup>4</sup> Apparently a Romanian report of the Kissinger–Xuan Thuy conversation, not further identified.

<sup>5</sup> Apparent reference to a change in Nixon’s statement on arrival at Saigon on July 30. The text of the statement is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1969*, pp. 584–585.

**106. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, August 6, 1969.

SUBJECT

Meeting in Paris with North Vietnamese<sup>2</sup>

Attached is the full account of my conversation at Paris with Xuan Thuy and Mai Van Bo.

The following points seem to me to be of particular significance:

—Xuan Thuy did not hit back hard at my statements about the necessity for us to take actions of gravest consequence if there is not major progress by November 1. He did say that if we do not agree to a solution on the basis of the NLF ten points, they will have no choice but to continue to fight. But he did not press this point strongly.

—Although he “explained” the ten points to me, he did not do so very aggressively. He stated that he did not regard them as the “ten commandments” after I said that we did not so regard them.

—Xuan Thuy indicated a desire to see me again, “if we can make progress.”

—The meeting was business-like and serious, but conducted in a fairly easy atmosphere.

—Xuan Thuy emphasized the question of troop withdrawals and political settlement, calling for unconditional U.S. withdrawal and on the removal of Thieu, Ky and Huong. He also expressed particular interest in our views on neutralization. He said that they wanted the North to be socialist, among other things, and the South to be democratic. This distinction may not mean anything but is nonetheless noteworthy.

—Xuan Thuy for the first time hinted at some linkage between the withdrawal of our forces and theirs (points two and three of their ten points). While he was vague on specifics, the message was clear and significant.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 863, For the President's File, Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David Memcons, 1969–1970. Top Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. The memorandum is not initialed by Kissinger.

<sup>2</sup> The decision for Kissinger to meet with Xuan Thuy in Paris was part of the initiative with Sainteny; see Document 97. Initially Nixon and Kissinger wanted Sainteny to travel to Hanoi on their behalf to deliver Nixon's letter (see footnote 4, Document 97), but the North Vietnamese would not give Sainteny a visa and the letter was delivered to Mai Van Bo in Paris instead. Nixon and Kissinger then asked Sainteny to arrange a meeting between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho. Kissinger met Xuan Thuy instead since Le Duc Tho left Paris for Hanoi. (Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 277–278)

—He emphasized their desire for good relations—including technical, economic and cultural relations—between us once peace is achieved and reconstruction began.

—He preferred General Walters over Sainteny as a contact point.

## **Attachment**

### **Memorandum of Conversation**

Paris, August 4, 1969.

#### PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger  
Major General Vernon Walters  
Mr. William A.K. Lake  
Xuan Thuy  
Mai Van Bo  
Vietnamese Notetaker  
Vietnamese Interpreter

Dr. Kissinger opened the conversation by saying that he appreciated the opportunity of seeing Mr. Xuan Thuy and to be able to have direct discussions. He had known Mai Van Bo since 1967. He had always found him to show great diplomatic skill and subtlety. Dr. Kissinger said he would like to say a personal word before getting into the matter which had brought him there. He had been concerned with peace in Vietnam since 1965. Anyone who has followed Vietnamese history, particularly the events of the last five years, must be aware of the courage and dignity of the Vietnamese people. He was fully aware that after all that had happened, there was a great amount of distrust between our two peoples. But any discussions will be conducted on our side with respect for the courage and dignity of the Vietnamese people. He wondered whether there had been any answer to the letter from our President which had been delivered in Paris two weeks before. Xuan Thuy said that President Nixon's letter had been forwarded to Hanoi. It was not dated. Dr. Kissinger said the letter had actually been written three days before it had been delivered. Perhaps he should say a few things which President Nixon had asked him personally to convey.

Dr. Kissinger said that Washington had read with great care the statements that had been made at the plenary sessions and in the private meetings. Hanoi had often questioned our good will and our sincerity. It was hard for us to judge whether they did this for psychological effect or to what degree they really believed this. Dr. Kissinger said that he was there to tell them that we sincerely wanted peace and were approaching it with an attitude of good will, but he was also there to tell them how the situation appeared to us.

On November 1, 1969, the negotiations which led to the end of the bombing would be one year old. During this period, the U.S. had made what we consider to be significant moves. We had ended reinforcements, we had a partial bombing halt, then a total bombing halt, and the withdrawal of 25,000 combat forces. We had offered to accept the result of free elections. To us it looks as if there had been no significant response. It is in the long term intolerable for us to be treated at every discussion like school boys who are taking an examination in the ten points of the NLF. We were willing to discuss their ten points but we also wanted a discussion of the proposals our side had made. Therefore, he was here to suggest to them from the highest possible level and in all sincerity that we attempt to make another effort to settle this conflict by the time the bombing halt is one year old—that is to say, by the 1st of November. As part of this effort, we would like to answer some of the questions which had been put to us by their side on various occasions. (Dr. Kissinger commented here that he was reading from notes which had been approved personally by the President):

—The United States is willing to withdraw all of its forces without exception from Vietnam as part of a program for the removal of all outside forces from Vietnam.

—The United States is prepared to accept any outcome of a free political process. In defining the political process, he would like to set forth a few propositions:

a. We realize that neither side can be expected to give up at the conference table what had not been conceded on the battlefield.

b. We believe that a fair political process must register the existing relationship of political forces.

c. We realize that we will differ with them on how to achieve this but neither side should be asked to accept the proposition that it can be defeated without noticing it. We are not asking them to disband the organized Communist forces and they should not ask us to disband the organized non-Communist forces.

—We remain prepared, as we had said, to discuss the ten points together with our own points. In order to show our good will in the period between now and November 1, we will withdraw somewhat larger forces than we have already withdrawn and reduce our B-52 and tactical air operations by 10%.

In order to expedite negotiations, the President is ready to open another channel of contact with them. He is prepared to appoint a high-level emissary who would be authorized to negotiate a conclusion. This special contact makes sense only if negotiations are serious. If this contact takes place, the President is prepared to adjust military operations in order to facilitate the negotiations. If the objective was sufficiently serious and the conclusion sufficiently imminent, the President is prepared to ask Dr. Kissinger to conduct the discussions.

At the same time, Dr. Kissinger had been asked to tell them in all solemnity that if by November 1, no major progress has been made toward a solution, we will be compelled—with great reluctance—to take measures of the greatest consequences.

We had noticed that in their propaganda and in the Paris discussions, they were attempting to make this “Mr. Nixon’s War.” We did not believe that this was in their interest. If it is Mr. Nixon’s War, he cannot afford not to win it. Dr. Kissinger then said, “you are a courageous, indeed a heroic people,” and no one knows what the final result would be of such a sequence of events. We believe that such a tragic conflict to test each other can be avoided.

He wished to conclude with the same statement with which he began. If there are serious discussions we will make every effort to treat Hanoi with the respect and courtesy to which their sacrifices entitle them. In fairness and respect he must tell them that we cannot continue to accept the procedures that have characterized our contacts in the last 15 months after November 1. He also hoped that when we looked back on this conversation, we would consider it a turning point toward peace and reconciliation between our two peoples.

Xuan Thuy then asked whether Dr. Kissinger had finished, as he would like to ask a few questions for clarification. Dr. Kissinger said, “Please do,” and noted that he had read Xuan Thuy’s questions at the negotiations and they were always acute.

Xuan Thuy then said, “you say that between now and November 1, all problems will be settled, but at the same time, you say that from now to November 1, U.S. will withdraw troops in greater numbers than the 25,000 already withdrawn. What is the meaning of these two propositions?”

Dr. Kissinger replied that this was a sign of our good will and sincerity. But we would make no further concessions. Xuan Thuy said that he did not clearly understand. Dr. Kissinger then said that he had not said that all troops must be out by November 1 but that there must be an understanding by which it is clear *when* all troops will be out.

Xuan Thuy then asked whether he understood rightly that between now and November 1 the U.S. would withdraw more troops in a greater number than the 25,000. That is one question. Another is whether from now on there are meetings and discussions for settling these matters.

Dr. Kissinger said that we proposed between now and November 1 that we agree to make a serious major effort to agree on all essential matters. (We then propose that on issues of great consequence or issues of principle he would be prepared to come to Paris or any other place on weekends to discuss outstanding problems. This would not happen unless the issues were serious. (As Xuan Thuy did not appear

to have clearly understood, Dr. Kissinger repeated the statement.)) He then continued that we were proposing this so that before history and our conscience we could say that we had done everything possible to avoid what we must otherwise do. (Xuan Thuy smiled without mirth, and consulted Mai Van Bo.)

Xuan Thuy then asked if he might ask another question. “Do you mean that the Four Party Conference should go on as now and that besides this there be other discussions between the DRV and the US only?”

Dr. Kissinger replied that we now have the plenary discussions on Ave. Kleber in which the speeches made are not distinguished by their novelty. (Xuan Thuy smiled.) We have private discussions on the Ambassadorial level and we have started technical discussions between Habib and Ha Van Lau. If any one of these prove useful, they should be continued. If they believed that the existing forums lend themselves to a solution, we have no interest in complicating the situation. If it should prove possible to avoid repetition of some of the speeches released by both sides, we would be prepared to open another forum provided this promised to achieve a rapid solution on issues of great importance. As for his own participation, his other duties did not permit him to spend considerable time on negotiations in which issues were not clearly defined. The technical execution could be carried out in existing forums. His participation would have to remain secret and on some occasions, because of his other responsibilities, he would be replaced by someone who would have the full confidence of the President himself.

Xuan Thuy said that Dr. Kissinger had referred to the neutralization of Vietnam and he would like to understand further what was meant.

Dr. Kissinger said that Xuan Thuy had raised this question with Sainteny when they had met previously. He simply wanted to say that we agreed with it in principle, and were prepared to discuss it. But we did not think that this was the occasion for negotiations on it. In any event, he could tell them that we do not intend to maintain bases in Vietnam.

Xuan Thuy said that Dr. Kissinger had referred to negotiations “at the highest level”. Dr. Kissinger reiterated that he was speaking *on behalf* of the highest U.S. level. He could also say that we would be prepared to send an emissary to meet for example with their Foreign Minister, or Prime Minister, provided that there was some assurance that this would lead to a rapid conclusion. At this point it would probably be best to narrow the issues of disagreement on major issues by existing procedures he had outlined.

Xuan Thuy then asked whether he might express his views. He said that he had up to now listened very attentively to Dr. Kissinger.

He would like to have an exchange of views in a very straightforward and realistic way so that they could better understand each other's views, so as to contribute to a correct and rapid settlement of the Vietnamese problem. Vietnam is far from the U.S., more than 10,000 miles away. Vietnam had done no harm to the U.S. The U.S. Government in the past had intervened in the Vietnamese problem and had set up the administration of Ngo Dinh Diem and successive administrations in South Vietnam. Then the U.S. had brought in its advisers, military personnel and war-making units of U.S. combat troops. There was a half million U.S. troops in South Vietnam. In the meantime, the U.S. had launched a war of destruction against the DRV with its air and naval forces, thus creating a great deal of suffering for people in both South and North Vietnam. The Vietnamese people had been forced to fight against this intervention and aggression to defend their existence and the sacred rights of their fatherland. Dr. Kissinger had studied the history of their people and knew that the Vietnamese people had an age old history and that their history was characterized by struggles against foreign aggression. The Vietnamese people in this fight for the defense of their independence, freedom and peace had been united in rising against foreign aggression. They had never been subdued by any power or deception. Over the past 25 years the people had been continuously fighting for their just cause. What did they want? Nothing but their independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. These were recognized by the 1954 Geneva Agreements. Now in view of the special circumstances in Vietnam, they wanted the North to be independent, to live in peace and to be socialist. For South Vietnam, they wanted an independent, democratic, neutral, peaceful life. They understood a neutral South Vietnam to be a SVN without foreign troops, without military bases, without being involved in any way in any military alliance, without being under the protection of any military bloc. The reunification of Vietnam would be carried out step by step, by peaceful means and by mutual agreement between the two zones.

With regard to Laos, Xuan Thuy said they recognize the peaceful, independent sovereignty of Laos and the Geneva Agreements of 1962 on Laos. On Cambodia they recognize the peaceful sovereignty and territorial integrity of Cambodia in its present boundaries. They want to live in friendship and peace with all nations over the whole world. They wanted broad relations—economic, cultural, technical—with all nations. In a word, they want peace, not war. They had been actually compelled to fight by the American authorities and they want peace—but not peace at any price, peace with independence and freedom. He had several times told Ambassador Cabot Lodge that the NLF had presented its 10 points and that they approved them for an overall solution as they were logical and reasonable. If the 10 points were now taken as a basis, the war could come to a prompt and rapid solution.



If the war goes on, or is expanded, they would be forced to continue fighting in order to reach their objectives. They had sufficient determination to do so but they were also rich in goodwill.

Now, asked Xuan Thuy, how can the Vietnam problem be settled? There are two basic questions. The first question is the total withdrawal of all US forces and of the forces of their camp from South Vietnam. They agreed to the proposals set down—the 10 points—that is, all US troops must withdraw from South Vietnam without conditions.

Dr. Kissinger asked if he might interrupt on this point. He would comment on Xuan Thuy's exposé after he finished. If he might make a specific point and he would like Walters to repeat it in French, it was this: we were willing to discuss the 10 points, but we do not regard the 10 points as the Ten Commandments. On the matter of unconditional withdrawal he must tell them that he would not quarrel about the word unconditional. But they knew and we knew that there must be a *quid pro quo* for American withdrawal, a unilateral pull-out was out of the question. He was not there to argue phrases, but since we are speaking here in private, there must be a clear relationship between our withdrawals and theirs. They must understand this and not have any illusions.

Xuan Thuy replied that each side understands this matter in its own way. He did not understand that the 10 points were the Ten Commandments or the Bible but that the 10 points in view of the situation in Vietnam were logical and realistic. Therefore, he felt it necessary to explain that in the 10 points there were points 2 and 3. This Dr. Kissinger knew. (Dr. Kissinger said that he knew the 10 points but not as well as Xuan Thuy, who smiled.) Point 2 dealt with the armed forces of the US and other foreign countries in South Vietnam. These are the only foreign forces in South Vietnam. As for Point 3, it deals with Vietnamese armed forces in South Vietnam. This question will be settled by the Vietnamese parties among themselves. Points 2 and 3 belonged together. In the eight points of President Nixon, in the points dealing with the withdrawal of U.S. and allied troops, it is pointed out that some troops withdraw in twelve months; on the remaining troops, one doesn't know when. If the U.S. sets a time limit of twelve months for some and the remainder without time limit, then it looks as if the U.S. doesn't want to withdraw its troops completely.

Xuan Thuy referred to Dr. Kissinger's statement that the U.S. is prepared to withdraw all troops in South Vietnam and intends to maintain no bases. He took notes of this statement. But now he must ask about President Nixon's speech—why could the U.S. bring its troops in so quickly, but need so long to withdraw them. Why not do so in say five or six months?

Dr. Kissinger asked if he could interrupt. Xuan Thuy said he preferred to finish.

Now, Xuan Thuy continued, Mr. Advisor Kissinger says the U.S. has withdrawn 25,000 troops. Thuy had repeatedly commented that this 25,000 number is insignificant in comparison with the 540,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam. Even if another 25,000 or more were now withdrawn, it would still be insignificant. Therefore, Xuan Thuy had often said that the U.S. wants to carry out troop withdrawal in dribbles, and wants to prolong its military occupation of South Vietnam. It has created doubt in their minds about the intentions of the U.S.

The second fundamental problem, Xuan Thuy continued, is the political regime in South Vietnam, the elections in South Vietnam. In the eight points of President Nixon this question is dealt with only superficially; they just say it will be settled by the Vietnamese themselves. They also say the U.S. is prepared to accept any result of elections. But the important question is: who will organize the elections? President Nixon said that the present Saigon administration is legal and constitutional, and that the present administration therefore has the right to organize elections. That is why President Nixon has agreed to the propositions of Nguyen van Thieu. Xuan Thuy said he thought that if they were really having a straightforward, real, frank discussion, one should not express himself in such a way. How can one say that the Saigon administration is legal and constitutional? It is well known to all the peoples of the world that the present Thieu–Ky–Huong administration, he said, is a warlike, dictatorial administration which oppressed anyone who speaks of coalition, neutrality or democratic liberties. If the Thieu–Ky–Huong administration remains as now, it would be difficult to settle the Vietnam problem.

Xuan Thuy added that he thought that Thieu–Ky–Huong must be changed (i.e. removed—trans.); they would consider the *remaining* administration as a reality, but this administration should change its policy and stand for peace, independence and neutrality. In their view—as mentioned in the 10 points—it is logical and reasonable to form a provisional government to hold elections. This is because the realities show on the one hand the PRG, on the other hand the Saigon administration. In addition there are other political forces. If the Saigon administration organizes the elections, then the PRG will not agree. If the PRG organizes the elections, then the Saigon administration does not agree. Therefore a provisional coalition government, composed of the PRG and the remainder of the Saigon government which is for peace, independence and neutrality, should organize the elections—then this is reasonable.

Xuan Thuy believed that if now these two key questions are settled, then peace will be rapidly restored. After the restoration of peace, Vietnam—both South and North—will begin the rebuilding of a new life. Xuan Thuy was sure that in this reconstruction they would establish relations—technical, commercial, economic, cultural—with all

countries, and that they would establish good relations and friendship with the US.

Xuan Thuy then said he was prepared to exchange views with Dr. Kissinger.

Dr. Kissinger replied that he appreciated what Xuan Thuy had said. He would like first to ask two clarifying questions.

Was Xuan Thuy saying that Thieu, Ky and Huong must be replaced before *any* new political construction, i.e. new political solution?

Xuan Thuy responded that the U.S. now says the PRG should hold talks with the Saigon administration. But the PRG says that the Thieu–Ky–Huong administration is warlike. They oppress anyone who speaks of coalition; therefore, if they were to talk to the Saigon administration, no settlement could be achieved. President Nixon had recently visited Saigon, he continued, to quiet this administration because it is torn by internal strife. This proves it has no popular support. This will create more problems for the U.S., including problems in Paris. That, he said, is why the PRG demands that Thieu–Ky–Huong be removed and the remaining administration change its policies to peace, independence and neutrality. The remaining administration could talk to the PRG.

Dr. Kissinger asked if he could put a second question to Xuan Thuy, one which was not perhaps polite but was asked in the spirit of frankness of this talk.

Xuan Thuy, he said, who had spent a long time in these negotiations, knew all the nuances. He did not. He therefore wondered whether in this meeting Xuan Thuy had said anything which was not already said at Avenue Kleber or in the private talks? If so, what was it?

Xuan Thuy said that the difference was that he had expanded for Dr. Kissinger's better comprehension on *how* U.S. troops must be withdrawn and how a provision coalition government should be organized. It is not the PRG which must organize it. This is the proposition of the PRG—and this proposition is logical and reasonable.

Dr. Kissinger asked if he were to understand that in this provisional coalition government, the PRG is to be represented together with what is left of the Saigon government.

Xuan Thuy said he would clarify: on the one hand, it is the PRG; on the other, the remainder of the Saigon administration which would have changed its policies and would stand for peace, neutrality and independence. These two would form the provisional coalition government.

Dr. Kissinger said he understood. He thought he should sum up a few things.

First, with respect to troop withdrawals—We have stated that we will withdraw our troops after a settlement. It is useless to discuss

whether we are serious. If they wish to know this, they should discuss it seriously. They could regulate our withdrawals by the speed of their own. If they did not wish to have U.S. and DRV troops treated as comparable, we could negotiate some correspondence. But there would be no withdrawal of U.S. forces without the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces. We do not insist on keeping U.S. forces in Vietnam after others are withdrawn. He could say on the highest authority that we seek no U.S. bases in Vietnam.

Secondly, Dr. Kissinger said he must tell Xuan Thuy, so he would not be misled or confused by people who visited him, that we will *not* replace Thieu, Ky or Huong any more than we ask them to replace any individuals in the PRG.

At the same time, he wanted to repeat what he had said earlier: any settlement must reflect the existing balance of political forces. We have no intention of humiliating anyone.

As he had understood Xuan Thuy's exposition, and as he had expounded also, there are two problems. One has to do with the withdrawal of forces, the other with a political solution. Xuan Thuy believes we have not been sufficiently precise on the issue of withdrawal. We believe they have been too precise on the question of a political solution. (Xuan Thuy laughed.) If we are to complete the major part of our work by November 1, we should stop talking about points and start talking about the problems. He believed they understood what we have in mind with respect to the withdrawal of forces. It remains therefore a question of finding some formula for establishing a relation between their forces and our forces.

The problem is of course much more complicated, Dr. Kissinger added, and this meeting is not the occasion to solve it. It must be done on the basis of recognition of the realities in South Vietnam—of the government in Saigon and of other political forces. With this accepted, we will work to find a solution reflecting the true wishes of the people of South Vietnam. We have too much respect for Xuan Thuy to believe that we could trick him into a solution which does not respect their dignity. But they cannot impose a dishonorable solution on us.

Dr. Kissinger suggested that they think over this conversation in this spirit. There are many ways of approaching a solution. They can speed up the work that goes on in existing forums, and they can be assured that it will be noticed in Washington. The President and he—Kissinger—read very carefully all that is said in Paris. If a very important issue is reached or there is something they wished to convey to the President but don't wish to say in a forum where too many people would know, he could arrange to be informed through Mr. Sainteny or General Walters, who remains in Paris. But it must be an important matter capable of being brought to a conclusion.

Xuan Thuy asked whether General Walters was present at the meeting. Dr. Kissinger said that he is our Defense Attaché at Paris. He was General Eisenhower's interpreter and is an acquaintance of President Nixon. He cannot discuss, but can take information, Dr. Kissinger said.

Xuan Thuy asked for his address. Dr. Kissinger promised it to him later. (At the end of the meeting, General Walters gave Mai Van Bo his telephone numbers at home and at the office.)

Dr. Kissinger wished to say one other thing. When he was a professor, he had started out with problems of philosophy and art. He recognized that the most difficult problems are not where good people meet evil people, but are where two strong people with strong convictions confront each other. (Xuan Thuy smiled.) We would prefer to have the Vietnamese as friends rather than as enemies, Dr. Kissinger continued. He was talking to Xuan Thuy so that at the end of the year—that is, after November 1—our two peoples who have no fundamental disagreement with each other, should not once again need to test each other's resolution. He believed that we must make an effort to find a solution between now and November 1.

Dr. Kissinger then said he had one practical problem to raise. Did they prefer Sainteny or General Walters as a means to communicate with him (Kissinger)? Or maybe not at all? Xuan Thuy said if he had anything to convey, he would say it to General Walters. Dr. Kissinger reiterated that General Walters cannot discuss; he can only take messages for Dr. Kissinger.

Xuan Thuy asked if Dr. Kissinger were finished. When told yes, Xuan Thuy said Dr. Kissinger had stated that the U.S. had just partially, then totally stopped the bombing, and had then withdrawn 25,000 troops. Dr. Kissinger had said this showed goodwill. But he had added that he had found no goodwill by the DRV. This was not true. The DRV rather had responded with great goodwill. Originally they demanded that the bombing be totally stopped before talks. But the U.S. only partially stopped it, and they had talked. Then, when the U.S. had stopped the bombing, we had said we would talk on November 6. But we didn't, and the conference only started two months later.

At the conference, Xuan Thuy continued, they have put forward their four points, the NLF five points, and now there are the overall ten points. The U.S. has its eight points and Saigon has proposed a number of things. But one must say that our plans of settlement—the eight points and Saigon's proposals—are not comprehensive at all.

The reason why the DRV agrees to the ten points of the NLF is that this overall solution is logical, reasonable and fair. It points out how military, political and other problems can be settled.

Dr. Kissinger noted that it has only one defect—we don't agree with it. Xuan Thuy smiled.

Xuan Thuy said there is a contradiction in our ideas. On the one hand, there is the rapid withdrawal of US and other countries' troops from Vietnam and an end to the war. (Dr. Kissinger interjected "and DRV" after "troops" in the preceding sentence.) On the other hand, Xuan Thuy said, we wish to consolidate the puppet government. How?

Dr. Kissinger said that this is our problem. We are not saying that we insist on any particular government being maintained after a settlement. But we will not—because it is beyond our power and for other reasons—replace Thieu and Ky and Huong. We want the people of South Vietnam to choose their own government after a settlement.

Xuan Thuy said that this is what Ambassador Lodge had told him many times. And he had told Lodge many times what he had said.

Dr. Kissinger said yes, that if this were to be the discussion, there would not be a solution by November 1.

Xuan Thuy said he would like to state that last June he had gone to Hanoi to meet with his government. His government was aware of all the details of the Paris conference and was fully in agreement with the views he had expressed in this meeting. His government had reaffirmed that all the negotiations in Paris on the Vietnam problem are entrusted to him and Le Duc Tho as the men responsible. Therefore he had today listened to Dr. Kissinger's views. He will, he said, report Dr. Kissinger's remarks to his government in Hanoi. He said he was prepared to study Dr. Kissinger's views and at the same time wanted Dr. Kissinger to study his. What he had been saying at the meeting, he felt he had said straightforwardly and frankly.

Xuan Thuy suggested that they thank Mr. Sainteny, their host, who had provided an opportunity for the meeting.

He said that he did wish to meet with Dr. Kissinger again if we can make progress.

Dr. Kissinger then asked Xuan Thuy to keep this discussion in absolute confidence and not to refer to it in other discussions which were taking place or to speak of it to anyone else.

Xuan Thuy agreed and added that when the private discussions became known it was not through them and if there were a leak it was in Washington. Dr. Kissinger said that they were right and this was the first agreement they had reached (humorously). He could assure him that this discussion would not leak from Washington.

Dr. Kissinger said that now that they had finished the formal discussion he would like to say something as a former professor who had studied diplomatic history. He could appreciate a good negotiator. If he understood what Xuan Thuy had said it was to ask for the impossible

and finally to agree to the barely conceivable as a major concession. Xuan Thuy smiled briefly.

Xuan Thuy said that he wanted to explain this to Dr. Kissinger so that he could have a better understanding of the 10 points of the NLF, of which they approved. As he had told Dr. Kissinger at the beginning there were two possibilities. It would be good if both sides could reach agreement on the basis of the 10 points, then a real agreement could be rapidly reached. If this were not possible, then the war could go on but they want the first possibility as peace is much better. If they could discuss and agree on military and political problems a settlement would be prompt. He had once told Ambassador Cabot Lodge that for questions regarding South Vietnam the U.S. should enter talks with the Provisional Revolutionary Government but they had accepted talks between the DRVN and the U.S. because the U.S. wanted them.

Dr. Kissinger said that we appreciated the meeting and he thought that they understood one another. He saw no further progress possible at this meeting. He understood that this was a serious problem for which their people had fought with great courage and on our side, too, we had suffered a great deal. He believed that the essential positions are clear and we would have to see in the next three months whether they were reconcilable. We have indicated a possible way by which this could happen. He wanted to tell Xuan Thuy of the President's sincerity but equally of his determination. He would also like to tell him personally of his respect for him and his people. This will continue whether they found a way to be friends or whether fate forces us into an expanded confrontation.

Xuan Thuy said that their aspirations were for independence and peace, and Dr. Kissinger had said that neither side should humiliate the other side. Ambassador Cabot Lodge had once said to him that they were trying to force the U.S. to surrender. He had told him that he had no such idea. On the contrary, they were continuing to create favorable conditions for the U.S. to withdraw its troops. They had experienced 25 years of war, and therefore their aspirations for peace are real.

Dr. Kissinger then said that he suggested that they think about their discussion and we would watch what goes on at the meetings with great care. If Xuan Thuy thought another such discussion would be helpful he could call General Walters and we would arrange a visit and a meeting place, either there or at some other place. This discussion should be on matters beyond what is being discussed in the normal meetings. If they made a step significantly different from the usual steps they would find that we would meet them with a spirit of good will.

Xuan Thuy said that the same was true for them. But on our side we had only talked about methods for taking a step forward but had not offered any concrete step.

Dr. Kissinger said that President Nixon had made a proposal; we had said that we would recognize a free political process. We had stated propositions. He could not accept that we had made no propositions. We must now see where we must go. He did not want to get into detailed negotiations at this meeting. Dr. Kissinger repeated that if they showed willingness to achieve a reasonable compromise, we would not try to take advantage of them or to humiliate them.

After parting amenities the Vietnamese expressed the desire to leave first without taking leave of Mr. Sainteny as they would thank him when they saw him again.

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### 107. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, August 7, 1969.

#### SUBJECT

General Wheeler's Assessment of the Soviet Role in The Paris Negotiations

Attached is General Wheeler's assessment of the Soviet role in the Paris negotiations<sup>2</sup> which was sent to me by Mel Laird during your trip.

General Wheeler makes the following points:

—The premise for total cessation of hostile acts against North Vietnam has been violated.

—The Soviet Union has relaxed pressure on North Vietnam.

—Without support given by the Soviet Union, the North Vietnamese military effort would collapse within a few months.

—Immediate diplomatic action should be directed at the Soviet Union to press the North Vietnamese to pursue meaningful negotiations.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 138, Vietnam Country Files, Vol. IX, 8/1/69–8/31/69. Secret; Sensitive. The following handwritten note appears on the memorandum: "ret 8/20 Pres has not seen." On August 12 Kissinger sent Laird a short memorandum that read: "I have shown both your memorandum and the attachment to the President, who agrees with your assessment that General Wheeler has written an illuminating and important report." (Ibid.)

<sup>2</sup> Attached but not printed was CM-4433-69, a July 14 memorandum from Wheeler to Laird.



**108. Letter From the Head of the Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks on Vietnam (Lodge) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Paris, August 9, 1969.

Dear Henry:

Herewith our analysis of your discussion with Xuan Thuy:

Thuy gave every sign of being intensely interested in all that you said. He surely did not miss the basic thrust of your message—including the reference to “Mr. Nixon’s war” and to the deadline, although he obviously cannot know just what these statements mean.

He will report your statements to Hanoi. Nothing will happen until Hanoi completes its study of the President’s letter, your message, and the other signals which it has been given—notably the President’s statements in Saigon and the actions which we have been taking on the ground.

The North Vietnamese will surely not ignore the threats in your statement, even though Thuy did not respond directly to your words and did not discuss what should happen after November 1. To the extent that he did mention the date it was only to ask about what would be done before November 1.

But in two places he replied, although making sure each time to express good will and a preference for peace. Once he said, “If the war goes on, or is expanded, they would be forced to continue fighting in order to reach their objectives. They had sufficient determination to do so but they were also rich in good will.” (page 5 of your notes) And again, after speaking of agreement on the basis of the 10 points, he said “If this were not possible, then the war would go on but they want the first possibility, as peace is much better.” (page 12)

In this way Thuy is saying, and Hanoi will probably do the same, that they are prepared to negotiate (on terms which I will discuss below) but that they are also prepared to go on fighting.

Thus, while they will recognize the threat, they probably will not react by making a major step toward meeting our position on the issues. They are more likely to make tactical moves in order to hold off

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Massachusetts Historical Society, Henry Cabot Lodge II Papers, Reel 9. Top Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. On August 7 Kissinger wrote Lodge a letter enclosing the memorandum of conversation of his August 4 meeting with Xuan Thuy (see attachment to Document 106). In his letter Kissinger requested Lodge and Habib’s “assessment of the discussions as soon as practical.” This letter was Lodge’s response.

the “consequences” of which you spoke to Thuy. They might for example, begin to negotiate more actively (even with a special emissary) but not give away any substance. They may even calculate that we are bluffing. They could hold to their positions right up to the deadline and see how we act, knowing that a change on their part at the last minute might get us to hold off. Alternatively, they could refuse to make a major change and in effect dare us to act, believing that we could not sustain an escalation of the war, but being themselves ready to pay a short-term price, however high.

As regards negotiating, he did not give much. He recognized that you were not negotiating the issues with him at that moment, but he did wish to make some things clear.

One was their willingness to talk with us about everything. This suits them: they do not wish to talk with the present GVN about anything.

He also was quite interested in making sure that he understood the offer that emissaries should meet at a higher level. But he later emphasized the responsibility given to him and Le Duc Tho. This may be his way of knocking down the idea without, however, formally rejecting it. He would not have the authority to do this last out of hand.

He was probably not clear as to what the future at the Paris Meetings would be. Your explanation that we could narrow the issues of disagreement would not mean much to him. The issues of disagreement are already narrowed—what he is looking for is a further move on our part in their direction.

Thuy made a great point of singling out the two key issues. This is not new. But he explained what he meant in a way he has not done explicitly before and thus underlined the nature of their position and its significance.

Thus, on withdrawal he used some new words when he related points 2 and 3 of the ten points. This has always been implicit in their formulation of the ten points, and we have read it so, but he carried the argument a step further with you. In doing so, however, he was careful not to indicate in any way that they were prepared to engage in a step by step tacit withdrawal process. He left their withdrawal open, but gave no sign that it would be phased and geared to our withdrawal.

As regards a political settlement he went further than previously in explaining how a provisional “coalition government” could be formed. He did not wipe out the entire GVN—just decapitated it, while making clear that all the remaining administration would have to do would be to negotiate a provisional “coalition government” with the PRG. Note that the task for Saigon is to “talk” with the PRG. When he says the Saigon administration (renovated and decapitated) and the

PRG would “form” the provisional coalition government, he means they will decide on who shall be in it.<sup>2</sup>

It is not clear whether the PRG and the renovated Saigon administration would share in governing or just share in picking the provisional “coalition”. On page 7 he says the “coalition” will be “composed of the PRG and the remainder of the Saigon government” but elsewhere (page 8) he says “the remaining administration could talk to the PRG.” Further, he did not answer your question on the bottom of page 8 with a clear affirmative. Instead, he said the two “would form the provisional government.”

I stress this because in the past the DRV and PRG have said that the PRG need not be represented in the provisional coalition government. Although Thuy usually chooses his words carefully, it is not certain what he means in this instance. He may be leaving the choice open (for what it may be worth) between a coalition of the PRG and of the remaining Saigon government, or the formation of a “coalition government” by means of the two sides choosing individuals for a temporary and limited purpose.

That is a detail, but one which I thought worth noting because of the trouble we have always encountered when we try to figure out exactly what they mean when they are being a bit ambiguous.

In any event, his attitude toward the present GVN is clear. However he dresses it up, he is calling for the removal of Thieu–Ky–Huong (by us) and the formation of the “peace cabinet” of which they have spoken before. And he adds the proviso that this “remaining administration should change its policy and stand for peace, independence and neutrality.” In other words, not only must the present leadership go, but the “remaining administration” would have to be composed of people acceptable to the other side.

The emphasis on “provisional coalition government” is also nothing new. It is also the keystone of Hanoi’s policy. Thuy’s words make it even more evident that a political settlement goes before all. Withdrawal—even mutual withdrawal dressed up and camouflaged—is ne-

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<sup>2</sup> On August 12 Lodge sent Kissinger “a sequel to my letter of August 9,” in which he noted that Xuan Thuy went “into greater detail regarding a political settlement than ever before, particularly as to the provisional so-called ‘coalition government.’” Lodge suggested a “counter idea” which matched Xuan Thuy’s details—a series of specific issues to be discussed with the GVN in an attempt to answer certain questions: Who would organize elections and under whose laws? How would the electoral commissions be chosen and what authority would they have? What kinds of elections—presidential or national assembly? What would the armed forces (including police) on both sides be doing? Lodge suggested clarifying these details with Thieu and then deciding with him what to tell Hanoi. (Massachusetts Historical Society, Henry Cabot Lodge II Papers, Reel 9)

gotiable. But the hardness of the position on a political settlement emerges nonetheless.

Thuy also was careful to say (twice) why it would be “difficult” to settle the Viet-Nam problem with Thieu-Ky-Huong. It is because they are warlike; because they claim to be legal and have the right to organize elections; it is because they are against coalition, neutrality and democratic liberties. The stress is on “coalition” and who organizes election. Could it be that Thuy is saying that if Thieu would change his policy and accept a “provisional coalition government”, then it would be possible to settle the problem with the present government? This is a question which has always been lurking in the background. I see no way of getting an answer now without playing into Hanoi’s hands—even if we were to be willing to consider such a proposition.

It is clear that they are firm on a “provisional coalition” now. They leave a few cracks, but their objective is obvious. They heard you out on our unwillingness to replace the GVN leadership. Phil thinks that they do not yet believe us on this point. But they will think about it and they will also think about your statement (repeated) that “any settlement must reflect the existing balance of political forces.” That will puzzle them—and they will try to parse it out and then relate it to their ideas.

Finally, they will think it all over carefully. We will get some answers—maybe here—but they will dribble out their response always trying to get us to be more “concrete”. They are always seeking details and new formulations. That is as close as they seem ever to come to negotiation.

They will have well noted all that you said, particularly the points listed on page 2 of your notes and for which you cited specific Presidential approval. Some of this is new to them, for example, the statement on withdrawal of all forces “without exception”, on registering the existing relationship of political forces, and not asking them to disband organized Communist forces.<sup>3</sup> They will think about these things, about “Mr. Nixon’s war” about the November 1 deadline, and then they may make a small move. We will need to be alert to all shadings, but I do not anticipate any major breakthrough.

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<sup>3</sup> On August 11 Kissinger sent Lodge a letter thanking him for “his excellent analysis.” Kissinger stated: “I am concerned, however, that there is one misunderstanding which probably resulted from imprecision in the transcript. When I spoke of ‘organized forces’, I was referring to organized *political* forces—the NLF. The point I was attempting to make was that since we have not insisted on dismemberment of the political forces of the other side, it is totally unacceptable that they, in turn, should insist on dismemberment of the current regime in South Vietnam. In this context I do not believe I have made any concessions beyond which have already been approved.” (Ibid.)

My broad assessment as a result of the above analysis, therefore, is that no essential change of the DRV position emerges from what Xuan Thuy said to you—simply a few hints and shadings. What you said to him, of course, goes much farther than we have ever gone and is very new and important.

If this analysis and assessment of the meeting are correct, the question arises: what next?

One possibility is that the DRV will take the initiative to answer the President and you by a letter or by a request for a meeting.

If, on the other hand, Hanoi does not reply, we should consider whether I should ask for a private meeting with Xuan Thuy after I return here in late August. I would tell Thuy at such a meeting that we are interested in learning his government's reaction to the President's letter and to your presentation.

The DRV may reply by calling for a renewal of the Habib/Lau meetings on which they are now holding back. If they do, we should go ahead with our presentations and rebuttals as already approved. Habib might question Lau on Thuy's formulations with respect to a new so-called "coalition government". This should, of course, be cleared in advance with Thieu.

Another new element would be our confirmation, if asked by Lau, of the two new points you made to Thuy (without referring to your conversation): 1) that the US is prepared to withdraw *all* its forces if the DRV does so; and 2) that the US does not require that all Communist forces in the South be disbanded.

I believe that these actions would be our best sequel to the initiatives which the President and you have taken.

With warm regards,

As ever yours,

**Henry Cabot Lodge<sup>4</sup>**

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<sup>4</sup> Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature. The signed copy is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 861, For the President's File, Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David Memos, 1969–1970.

109. **Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Head of the Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks on Vietnam (Lodge)**<sup>1</sup>

Washington, August 14, 1969, 2335Z.

The President has asked that I forward to you the following message:

"I am in full agreement with Ambassador Bunker's views on the private talks as outlined in Saigon 16292<sup>2</sup> and have noted that instructions from State on this subject are generally consistent with Bunker's views. Nevertheless, I am reinforcing these views through a separate back channel message to you. I believe that the U.S. has been as forthcoming as can be reasonably expected in the talks thus far and direct that in subsequent meetings, Habib confine himself to confronting the other side with a number of direct questions designed to elicit their views. Lacking responsiveness on the part of the other side, Habib should avoid any reiteration of our position, avoid protestations of our good will, and avoid the hint of any new concessions on our part lacking reciprocity.["]<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 64, Memoranda to the President, 1969 August. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. In an attached August 15 covering memorandum to the President, Kissinger informed Nixon that "pursuant to our discussion, I sent messages to both Lodge and Bunker via back channels, informing them of your views on the conduct of the next secret meetings in Paris."

<sup>2</sup> In telegram 16292 from Saigon, August 13, Bunker agreed with Lodge's analysis that in Paris the DRV was interested in learning as much as possible about the U.S. position on a settlement, but he also "believed there was a tactical limit as to how far and how fast we go in opening our hand without any sign of reciprocal movement from the other side." Although he endorsed the idea of confronting the other side with a number of direct questions designed to elicit their views, he would not recommend going "on endlessly elaborating our views without receiving something in return." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 180, Paris Talks/Meetings, Private Paris Meetings, July–August 1969)

<sup>3</sup> Kissinger sent a similar backchannel message to Bunker on August 14. (Ibid.) In backchannel message Saigon 087, August 15, Bunker acknowledged receipt of Kissinger's message and commented: "I feel that the posture [the President] has defined of position to be taken in Paris is one most likely to elicit views of the other side and hence produce progress." In backchannel message 509 from Paris, August 15, Lodge acknowledged Nixon's instructions and noted he assumed it did not mean that Habib would not be precluded from brief restatements of U.S. positions, if the discussion called for it. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 64, Memoranda to the President, 1969 August)

**110. Editorial Note**

In late August 1969 Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield traveled to Cambodia. During his visit Mansfield spoke with Sihanouk for 2 hours, with the Prince dominating the conversation. According to the telegraphic report of their meeting, Sihanouk told Mansfield that the “main threat to Cambodia is presently Vietnamese communism” and he admitted “that North Vietnamese were violating Cambodia’s frontiers, although he did not at first believe U.S. and other reports regarding use of his territory as a sanctuary.” Sihanouk stated it was important to be able to talk to those with whom one disagrees. He had learned this from the break with the United States—Sihanouk interjected that he would never again break relations with the United States—and he explained Cambodia’s official relations with the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese. Sihanouk denied that arms transited through Sihanoukville to the Viet Cong, but he did admit there was arms trafficking within Cambodia in new Chinese weapons captured by Cambodian troops. Sihanouk then raised the issue of U.S. bombing of Cambodia. The relevant extract telegram reads as follows:

“Sihanouk pointed out to Senator Mansfield that there were not Cambodian protests of bombings in his country when these hit only VC’s and not Cambodian villages or populations. He declared that much of his information regarding U.S. bombings in uninhabited regions of Cambodia came from U.S. press and magazines. He strongly requested the avoidance of incident involving Cambodian lives.” (Telegram 26 from Phnom Penh, August 26; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 12, Geopolitical File, Cambodia, Bombing, 1969–1970)

Kissinger also reproduces this extract in *White House Years* (page 251) as part of his evidence that Sihanouk gave tacit approval to secret U.S. bombing of Cambodia.

**111. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, August 30, 1969.

SUBJECT

Response from Ho Chi Minh

Attached is a translation of the response from Ho Chi Minh, received in Paris on August 30, 1969.

It is a very tough, almost insolent, message. It states only what the U.S. must do. It makes demands but no concessions. Although addressed to the President of the United States, it refers to "American governing circles." If one wished to look for silver linings, one could find some hope in the fact that this is the first communication we have received that has not linked the word "unconditional" with the call for our withdrawal from Vietnam. The last paragraph is rather conciliatory, although probably for the sake of symmetry.

The letter is disappointing in content, but does have the virtue that it can help demonstrate the necessity of whatever actions are taken in November.

**Attachment**

**Letter From North Vietnamese President Ho Chi Minh to President Nixon**

Hanoi, August 25, 1969.

I have the honor to acknowledge receipt of your letter.<sup>2</sup>

The war of aggression of the United States against our people, violating our fundamental national rights, still continues in South Vietnam. The United States continues to intensify military operations, the B-52 bombings<sup>3</sup> and the use of toxic chemical products multiply

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 106, Country Files, Vietnam, "S" Mister, Vol. I. Top Secret; Eyes Only; Nodis. A handwritten note on the memorandum reads: "President has seen."

<sup>2</sup> See footnote 4, Document 97.

<sup>3</sup> Nixon underlined the phrases "intensify military operations" and "the B-52 bombings."



the crimes against the Vietnamese people. The longer the war goes on, the more it accumulates the mourning and burdens of the American people. I am extremely indignant at the losses and destructions caused by the American troops to our people and our country. I am also deeply touched at the rising toll of death of young Americans who have fallen in Vietnam by reason of the policy of American governing circles.

Our Vietnamese people are deeply devoted to peace, a real peace with independence and real freedom. They are determined to fight to the end, without fearing the sacrifices and difficulties in order to defend their country and their sacred national rights.<sup>4</sup> The overall solution in ten points of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam and of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam is a logical and reasonable basis for the settlement of the Vietnamese problem. It has earned the sympathy and support of the peoples of the world.

In your letter you have expressed the desire to act for a just peace. For this the United States must cease the war of aggression and withdraw their troops from South Vietnam, respect the right of the population of the South and of the Vietnamese nation to decide for themselves, without foreign influence.<sup>5</sup> This is the correct manner of solving the Vietnamese problem in conformity with the national rights of the Vietnamese people, the interests of the United States and the hopes for peace of the peoples of the world. This is the path that will allow the United States to get out of the war with honor.

With good will on both sides we might arrive at common efforts in view of finding a correct solution of the Vietnam problem.

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<sup>4</sup> Nixon underlined the words “They are determined to fight to the end” and “fearing the sacri-, to defend, country, rights” in this sentence.

<sup>5</sup> Nixon underlined this sentence with the exception of “For this”.

**112. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, September 2, 1969.

SUBJECT

Military Options in Laos

Attached is a coordinated State/Defense/CIA analysis of military actions which might be undertaken in support of the Royal Laotian Government.<sup>2</sup>

I find this a surprisingly negative and unhelpful paper. A number of possible actions are listed: initiation of B-52 reconnaissance and strike operations, improvement of Aerial Reconnaissance Direction Finding (ARDF) capability, deployment of two Thai infantry battalions [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*], provision of additional Thai air support of Laos, provision of Thai artillery support, provision of additional equipment to Laotian forces, and increasing Lao salaries and good allowances. However, all of the major moves are in effect ruled out, since the "cons" are listed in such a way as to outweigh the "pros," as follows:

—B-52 operations might result in further NVA escalation, and diplomatic complexities. In addition, there is a lack of suitable targets, and an excessive risk factor.

—Introduction of two Thai infantry battalions would provide a pretext for North Vietnamese escalation which Thai resources would be inadequate to meet. US air and logistical support would also be required.

—Additional Thai air support might tip the Thai hand if F-5's or F-86's were used, and the Thai allegedly would be unwilling to turn over their T-28's to the Lao unless higher-performance aircraft were provided them in return. The addition of these T-28's would not increase the total air effort in Laos.

—Provision of Thai artillery support in battery strength would not tactically be feasible and would invite NVA counteraction; anything less would be militarily unsound and would be opposed by the Thai.

What is left is provision of additional equipment to the Laotian forces, and increasing Lao salaries and food allowances. Even these

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1319, Unfiled Material, 1969, 3 of 19. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusive; Eyes Only. Sent for action.

<sup>2</sup> Dated August 19 and sent under Laird's signature; attached but not printed.

measures are said to cause problems due to the need to cut into US programs elsewhere and the additional budgetary and foreign exchange expenditures which would be entailed.

The analysis ends with these words:

“However, we would recommend that serious consideration be given to the feasibility of introducing additional modern equipment, increasing the Royal Lao tactical air capability, raising salaries and food allowances, and providing greater ARDF support in Northern Laos.”

Cutting away the bureaucratism, this recommendation would provide for a limited military response to the critical situation in Laos. Psychologically, though, it hardly seems sufficiently tangible or responsive to the situation to please either the Thai or the Lao. It is even somewhat contradictory—in knocking down the possibility of turning over Thai T-28's to the Lao, it was alleged that total Laotian air effort would not be increased, and in fact might be decreased, through use of lesser skilled Laotian crews; and yet a stepped-up Lao tactical air capability is called for. I suspect that what is really at work here is a DOD reluctance to disrupt programs which are under way in Vietnam and other parts of the world.

*Recommendations:*

*A. Immediate Action*

—Provide M-16s. Souvanna has again requested them and has underlined the favorable impact on morale which this step would have at this time.

—Provide T-28s for the Lao by shifting them from the Thai and then replacing the Thai losses. [2 lines of source text not declassified] Check the number of qualified Lao pilots and see whether immediate input of more trainees is necessary. If so, initiate an expanded training program in Thailand or elsewhere.

—Ascertain whether more C-47 and C-130 gunships could usefully be deployed. They have shown themselves a great morale factor for the Lao, and should be immediately introduced if they would bring good results. Provide more fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters.

—See whether logistic and ammunition support to Lao army is adequate and effect improvements if not. If more pay and allowances would make the Lao fight better, this, too, should be provided.

—Increase artillery support for key points in Laos. Reintroduce a Thai battery or single pieces where they would be able to provide training and also have military value, or institute immediate training for the Lao and prepare to turn over 105's—whichever is better tactically, or even a mix of all. Some artillery support is obviously better than no artillery support, as is now the case.

—Implement better reconnaissance capability and ARDF support on lines of communication into Northern Laos, if lack of information is a limiting factor in our ability to cope. (This may not be so important, with Meo spotters in much of the area.)

—Direct the Department of Defense to undertake immediately a program to accomplish the above.<sup>3</sup>

### *B. Contingency Planning*

The next crisis may come during the next dry season starting about November, or perhaps even earlier. If the Communists push hard to bring pressure on Souvanna Phouma, they may endanger the political balance in Vientiane.<sup>4</sup> Or they may force Souvanna into a compromise which leaves our interests out (even recognizing our leverage over Souvanna). In order to avoid a recurrence of slow bureaucratic response to a need for action in Laos, we should:

—Prepare a plan of retaliation for immediate execution if the Communists attack another Lao keypoint, e.g. B-52 anti-personnel raids on the Plaine de Jarres.

—Orchestrate now a publicity campaign concerning Communist pressures in Laos. This would:

- a. raise Communist nerves as to what we have in mind;
- b. prepare public opinion in the US if we have to do something else in Laos (e.g. B-52's) and provide some protection against the charge of escalation.

—Do a contingency paper as to what our behavior will be if the Communists upset the present fragile stability in Laos.

a. At what point do we decide that we no longer have any interest in preservation of the 1962 agreement?

b. How can we keep from reaching that point? i.e. are there means within our current level of military involvement to persuade the Communists that it is too dangerous to upset the balance? Can we forewarn

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<sup>3</sup> Nixon initialed the approve option.

<sup>4</sup> In a September 2 briefing memorandum to Nixon, Kissinger described the prospects for a North Vietnamese offensive in Laos: "The Communists appear to have contained the Royal Lao Government offensive in the Plaine des Jarres area, but have not counterattacked in significant force. Meanwhile, Ambassador Godley in conversations with Souvanna raised the problem of containing the anticipated Communist counter offensive. He started with the assumption that the Communists can take the offensive if Hanoi chooses to devote sufficient resources to the job. He recommended that Souvanna should talk with Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese representatives, to reassure them that he does not seek a military solution and that he does not intend to deny the Pathet Lao a role in Laos." Nixon wrote the following marginal comments: "(My God!)" and "K—we must force them to divert resources to Laos." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 10, President's Daily Briefs)

the Communists—possibly through the co-Chairmen and the ICC—that further aggression of the Muong Soui type will require us to take another look at the Geneva Accords and the question whether the Communists have not vitiated them?

c. What do we do if the point is reached? Do we move into the Panhandle and deprive the Communists of the benefit which they principally sought? Do we encourage the Thai to move into areas of critical importance to them [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] if the Souvanna Government falls? Do we encourage them to do so directly, or to use the enclave for a Lao Government-in-half-exile? How much backing do we provide?

Or do we simply extract what propaganda advantage we can, via the UN and elsewhere?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Nixon initialed the approve option.

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### 113. Memorandum From the Deputy Secretary of Defense (Packard) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, September 4, 1969.

SUBJECT

The My Lai atrocity

In March 1968 a task force of the Americal Division conducted a combat operation against My Lai, a Viet Cong controlled village in Quang Ngai Province. The mission was to seize the village and destroy it, after evacuating noncombatants, in order to eliminate a Viet Cong sanctuary. During the operation a small group of American soldiers reportedly shot many (possibly 100) unarmed, unresisting Vietnamese civilians. Those who had knowledge of the incident did not report it. Subsequent assertions of the Viet Cong that the Americans were killing hundreds of innocent civilians were investigated by the Commander of the 11th Infantry Brigade and Vietnamese Provincial Authorities, with inconclusive results. Headquarters, Department of the Army was

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 118, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam—Lt. Calley Case (The Mai Lai Atrocity). Confidential. The memorandum was retyped on White House stationery.

first apprised of this apparent war crime in March 1969 and started an investigation which is still in progress.

On the basis of evidence thus far developed, court martial charges will be preferred on September 4 or 5, 1969 against an Army Lieutenant allegedly implicated in the atrocity. Further delay might risk a loss of court martial jurisdiction, for the officer is scheduled to be discharged on September 6th. The known facts leave no doubt about the necessity of prosecution. If sufficient additional evidence is developed, charges will be brought against others. Details are contained in the attached "Statement of Facts and Circumstances."<sup>2</sup>

The next stage of the case will be a formal investigation of the charges under procedures which afford accused persons a hearing. Following this, the court martial convening authority will determine whether the charges will be referred for trial.

Publicity attendant upon such a trial could prove acutely embarrassing to the United States. It might well affect the Paris peace talks, and those nations opposed to our involvement in Vietnam will certainly capitalize upon the situation. Domestically, it will provide grist for the mills of antiwar activists.

Apart from publicity attendant upon any court martial proceedings, the incident will almost surely find its way into the public press by other means. A combat photographer who was working with the task force is reported to have given color-slide lectures about the incident to fraternal groups in the Cleveland area. Several Congressmen have learned of it through letters from a former serviceman.

We plan to furnish substantially the same information to the Chairmen of selected Congressional committees on 5 September 1969.

The Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs) will be in touch with his counterpart on your staff to work out an appropriate press plan.

**David Packard<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> Attached but not printed.

<sup>3</sup> The retyped copy indicates Packard signed the original.

**114. Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, September 4, 1969.

SUBJECT

Vietnamizing the War (NSSM 36)

In response to National Security Study Memorandum 36 (NSSM 36),<sup>2</sup> the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) have prepared a plan (Enclosure 1) to Vietnamize the war.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the Joint Staff, Pacific Command, and MACV inputs, the Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency contributed to portions of the study.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff have developed four alternative timetables for withdrawing about half of the American forces in Vietnam over 18, 24, 30, and 42 months. The JCS recommends that until the enemy threat declines, at least 267,500 U.S. troops should remain in South Vietnam. That residual force would:

Include a ground combat force of 2½ divisions (out of a 10% division pre-Vietnamization force). These 57,000 men would provide for emergency reinforcement of the RVNAF and safeguard U.S. base areas.

Provide artillery, tactical air, airlift, logistic, and advisory support to the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF). This complement would total about 210,500 men.

The JCS recommend, and I concur, that planning for Vietnamization should remain flexible and subject to periodic reassessments. The size, composition, and specific timing of each redeployment increment should be based on a careful evaluation of the existing situation and the reactions to previous redeployments. The JCS, in their report, contend the 42 month schedule for reducing U.S. troop presence to the 267,500 level is preferable from a military standpoint. They also believe the 30 month schedule can be accomplished with acceptable risks. Subsequent to submitting the report, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, told me he believed the 24 month schedule would be acceptable, in his judgment, for planning purposes.

I, too, believe the 24 month schedule has merit. I recommend such a schedule for planning purposes. It would allow us to maintain a steady momentum towards Vietnamization, with the apparent politi-

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 91, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnamization, Vol. 1A. Top Secret; Sensitive.

<sup>2</sup> Document 58.

<sup>3</sup> The JCS plan is in an appendix to Enclosure 1, a memorandum from Wheeler to Laird, JCSM-522-1-69, August 29; attached but not printed.

cal and economic dividends to the United States, while allaying to some extent the risks that a mood of despair and defeat might be engendered among the South Vietnamese people. The 24 month schedule would also provide time for a more orderly redeployment process for United States forces. If the 18 month schedule were followed, for example, nearly 200,000 U.S. troops would have to be redeployed in CY 1970. While I believe such a substantial redeployment could be accomplished in one year, the extra 6 months would provide the time required for more systematic and efficient planning and movement.

The Secretary of State agrees (Enclosure 2)<sup>4</sup> with my emphasis on flexibility and periodic reassessment, but believes on balance, the 18 month timetable should be our target. He, of course, agrees the nature and timing of Vietnamization should be subject to change if events so indicate.

In essence, then, I am recommending the adoption of the 24 month Vietnamization schedule for planning purposes. The follow-on planning can, and I believe should, stay flexible and be couched in terms of goals. While avoiding the impression of being married to a rigid timetable, we should avoid, on the other hand, any impression we are drifting. There are many uncertainties with which we must deal in considering (1) the impact of Vietnamization, (2) U.S. redeployment schedules, (3) U.S. residual force levels, (4) redeployment of air and naval forces, (5) budget implications, and (6) continuing Vietnamization planning. I should like to treat briefly each of these topics, in turn, and attempt to lay out the key factors involved, the uncertainties, and the options available to us.

#### *Impact of Vietnamization*

The impact of the Vietnamization program to date is uncertain. It will take many months for changes in the attitudes and activities of the Vietnamese Government and military forces to be evident. Likewise the impact of the Vietnamization program on pacification and ground combat is not yet discernible.

Some preliminary observations, however, can be made:

- The impact in South Vietnam appears on balance to be positive. There has been little or no panic, and some efforts by the government to increase its effectiveness are discernible. Nonetheless, the Vietnamization process has caused, in CIA's judgment, considerable uneasiness among the South Vietnamese. There is little doubt that Saigon's primary interest is with holding back the process as long as possible.

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<sup>4</sup> Enclosure 2 is a September 3 memorandum from Rogers to Nixon; attached but not printed.



- *Hanoi's reaction* is still clouded. We frankly do not know what it is. Most of the evidence now available suggests the Communists have chosen to fight the war in other ways than in the recent past and are making efforts to be in a position to capitalize on whatever opportunities Vietnamization may offer in the future.

- *Elsewhere in Asia*, it has become clear the troop-contributing countries want to participate more actively in troop-redeployment planning. I see no reason why satisfactory arrangements cannot be made for such planning. I believe we should not exclude, in that process, the possibility of trying to exact more support of various kinds for South Vietnam from other Asian nations rather than considering only the phase-down of troop-contributing country efforts.

- *Within the United States*, vocal opposition to the war has appeared to diminish; but I believe this may be an illusory phenomenon. The actual and potential antipathy for the war is, in my judgment, significant and increasing. We need demonstrable progress, and the prospect for continued progress, in Vietnamization to elicit continuing domestic support across a broad front. We need a positive and understandable program, even if its dimensions are not fully defined and are subject to change, which will appeal to the U.S. people.

In addition to looking at the impact of Vietnamization on the nations directly involved, it is also instructive to review the impact from a functional standpoint. Specifically, I would like to review briefly (a) the military effects and (b) the effect on the pacification program:

- *We expect continued improvements in the combat capability of the RVNAF.* There are a number of unknowns, however, affecting the rate and absolute level of this improvement. In my initial report of 2 June 1969 on Vietnamizing the War, I noted that, "These unknowns include, in-ter alia, the quality of leadership, the motivation of the armed forces, the psychological reaction of the South Vietnamese to U.S. redeployments, and the ability of the South Vietnamese to find a stronger organizational structure. These unknowns, collectively, can be at least as important to the overall situation in South Vietnam as the more tangible and measurable elements. With such unknowns, we must recognize the possibility that even with additional training, improved equipment, and increased combat support, the RVNAF will not be able soon to stand alone against the current North Vietnamese and Viet Cong force levels." Despite continuing RVNAF improvement, I believe this assessment remains valid.

The RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program was originally intended to prepare the RVNAF to meet the residual VC insurgency threat after the North Vietnamese troops had been withdrawn. That residual VC threat, however, has been declining. This diminishing VC threat, coupled with RVNAF improvement, must lead us to reorient

our thinking on the Vietnamization goals. We are now considering the feasibility of expanding the program to prepare the RVNAF to meet a combined VC/NVA threat. I now have under review actions to:

- Improve RVNAF leadership and esprit.
- Reduce desertion rates.
- Increase combined operations and planning.
- Improve RVNAF logistics and intelligence capabilities.
- Determine optimum RVNAF force structure.
- Develop strategy and tactics best suited to RVNAF capabilities.

We must bear in mind, however, that RVNAF progress will be particularly sensitive to the size and timing of U.S. redeployments. Despite the decline in overall allied military strength as U.S. troops withdraw, four important factors will govern the total combat capability of the allied forces remaining in Vietnam:

—*The numerical size of the RVNAF is increasing significantly.* The regular, popular and regional forces grew by 250,000 during the past 18 months to a total of about 896,000, and further expansion is planned.

—*Modern arms and equipment* of about \$1.2 billion in value are being turned over to the Vietnamese.

—*U.S. artillery, tactical aircraft, and logistical personnel remaining in the Residual Support Force* will provide the RVNAF with greatly improved firepower and mobility.

—*Virtually all of the programs aimed at quantitative improvement and expansion of the South Vietnamese ground forces will be completed by December 1970.* The Navy and Air Force programs extend to June 1972 but are small. Provided qualitative improvement in RVNAF keeps pace, allied forces should be able to prevent serious military setbacks and enable the GVN to continue its pacification and nation-building programs.

*The effect of Vietnamization on the pacification program is uncertain.* Local security is closely related to the size and effectiveness of the paramilitary forces, such as the Regional Forces (RF), Popular Forces (PF), and Revolutionary Development (RD) cadre. However, security scores in the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) undoubtedly reflect the large-scale presence of U.S. troops. A VC/NVA offensive against areas recently vacated by U.S. troops could cause serious erosion of pacification gains. These gains have been substantial during the past year, at least statistically. The latest assessment indicates that approximately 87% of the population is rated relatively secure. However, gains made under the accelerated pacification program are fragile. The areas remaining to be pacified may present more difficult problems than did earlier ones. Future progress is likely to be slow and sporadic, particularly if the enemy decides to contest the pacification effort directly.

In summary, I feel Vietnamization has been successful so far. There are uncertainties and risks, mainly incident to the timing, in proceeding with Vietnamization. There are graver risks involved, in my judgment, in not proceeding. There is ample reason to believe the

Vietnamization program can be continued, even at an accelerated pace.

#### *United States Redeployment Schedules*

The JCS plan provides four alternative timetables to withdraw U.S. forces from Vietnam. The timetables for reducing our force levels to 267,500 men include 18 month, 24 month, 30 month, and 42 month programs. Using July 1, 1969 as a starting point, these programs would terminate, respectively, on December 31, 1970; June 30, 1971; December 31, 1971; and December 31, 1972.

These schedules provide examples of possible alternatives and I believe we should consider these four plans as examples rather than as rigid alternatives. As the JCS recommend, we need to periodically reassess the impact and the enemy reaction as we reduce our forces.

The advantages of the slower 30 and 42 month Vietnamization program involve mainly the added military assurances that U.S. presence gives. It is clear the South Vietnamese leadership, for the most part, would view the slower programs as a stabilizing influence for them. The main disadvantages of the slower programs would be the impact on the United States people. It could be reasonably expected that such drawn-out programs would not be accepted by substantial segments of the United States public as enough positive momentum in attaining our objectives in Southeast Asia.

The advantages of the faster 18 and 24 month Vietnamization programs hinge mainly on the public support such positive movement should elicit. The disadvantages, of course, are the added military risks involved and the prospect, especially, with the 18 month program of a destabilizing effect on the South Vietnamese society and a less-efficient redeployment process on our part.

I know of no effective way to measure precisely these various elements. I do believe, however, the necessity for support by the U.S. people is the overriding factor involved. I believe it would also be desirable to keep our military leadership in tune with the Vietnamization program, not only as an assignment but also as a matter of conviction. General Wheeler's personal agreement that the 24 month schedule would be agreeable for planning purposes is therefore a significant step. In my judgment, the 24 month schedule, which terminates June 30, 1971 (the end of FY 1971), represents the most attractive basis for continued planning.

#### *United States Residual Force Levels*

The size of the U.S. residual force is one of the main issues discussed in the JCS final report. I am convinced that we must tailor the force to the overall situation as it develops in South Vietnam. I firmly believe that decisions on the size of the residual force and on the re-

deployment rate used in getting down to the residual force should be developed within the framework of your three criteria now so well publicized at home and abroad. To illustrate:

- If, as summed for NSSM 36, current VC/NVA force levels remain constant, the JCS-recommended U.S. residual force package would range from 267,500 to 285,000 men. This force would be designed to support the RVNAF, protect American units, and provide an emergency reinforcement capability.

- It may be possible to reduce the size of the JCS residual force while maintaining essentially the same capability. A review by my staff indicated that approximately 42,000 people (from 267,500 to 225,000) could be eliminated without significantly degrading support to the RVNAF and allied forces remaining in Vietnam and without assuming a decline in the enemy threat. The JCS addressed this point and disagreed the 225,000 man force could be achieved without degrading combat capability. We shall continue to address the issue, however.

- If the enemy threat declines from current levels, we could accept a reduced combat capability and withdraw additional forces. We will periodically reassess the need for a force of this size as Vietnamization moves ahead. I see no need to make any firm decision on the size of the residual force at this time. It is advisable, however, to delineate some tentative goals for planning purposes. We are ahead of schedule in redeploying the initial increments from South Vietnam. I believe we can continue to seek acceleration in redeployments, whatever our program for planning may be.

As an added point, I believe we should consider reducing the magnitude of the U.S. combat support to RVNAF. With few exceptions, RVNAF units today receive only a small fraction of the support provided to comparable American units. Under the JCS plans to Vietnamize the war, RVNAF forces will receive as much artillery, tactical air, airlift, and logistic support as U.S. combat units. This many-fold increase in support may not be needed. While we should provide the Vietnamese with the assistance they need, we should not necessarily endeavor to create an RVNAF as a mirror image of U.S. forces in organization, tactics and operations. I will continue to evaluate this problem.

#### *Redeployment of Air and Naval Forces*

A key point at issue in Vietnamization is whether reductions in U.S. out-of-country/offshore forces are feasible. The Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that such forces should not be within the terms of reference for Vietnamizing the war. I consider that additional reductions in out-of-country/offshore forces should be feasible in the coming months.

More specifically at issue is the question of redeploying tactical aircraft. The JCS believe that tactical aircraft withdrawals beyond those they propose (17% of the present force) would pose serious risks to our forces in Southeast Asia. I appreciate their concern, but believe that we can gradually reduce the magnitude of our tactical air operations in South Vietnam without appreciably affecting the course of the war.

I also believe that we should begin reducing the numbers of our tactical air units and their supporting forces based in Thailand. After the bombing halt in North Vietnam, the effort of these tactical air elements was shifted to Laos. Part of this effort has gone to support the Royal Lao Government and interdict routes into northern Laos. I would recommend against any reduction in the level of that support at this time. The remainder of this effort, however, has been concentrated largely on infiltration routes through the Panhandle. The cost of this effort is high and its net value, at least at current operating levels, uncertain.

The JCS plan indicates that the interdiction campaign in the Lao Panhandle has effectively reduced the level of enemy activity in South Vietnam. While this bombing has undoubtedly inflicted damage to the enemy's logistic system network and created significant resupply problems, the Central Intelligence Agency indicates that throughout the dry season the enemy was able to supply his forces in South Vietnam at a rate sufficient to sustain operations and replenish stockpiles. Supply shortages did occur in South Vietnam during the past year, but they were localized and temporary. The CIA has no information which would suggest that the enemy was forced to alter any major military operation for want of logistical support at any time during the period of intensive U.S. bombing of enemy supply lines. Consequently, we may be able to maintain an acceptable level of results using fewer resources. We shall continue to study this problem.

#### *Budgetary Impact*

The overall budgetary impact of the proposed force reductions is less than you may have hoped for. Using the JCS redeployment schedules, the total savings, after the withdrawals are completed, amount to approximately \$5 billion annually. This compares to a total current incremental cost of the war to the U.S. of about \$17 billion annually. Of the remaining cost, \$10 billion is required to maintain the sizable residual forces (including \$3 billion to operate the extensive tactical air support forces) and about \$2 billion represents our costs to supply and maintain the expanded RVNAF operations. This conflict will continue to require sizable resources as long as we provide air, artillery and other support on about the same scale as our forces now receive.

There are other factors involved in the cost picture. For example:

—The 350,000 military personnel assumed to leave the force structure represent 44 percent of the force increase of 800,000 which has occurred since 1965 to support our efforts in Southeast Asia. The remaining 450,000 military personnel include some specific units programmed for Southeast Asia and the CONUS training and support base required to sustain U.S. forces remaining there. The actual manpower reduction which might occur is also dependent upon factors such as rotation policies, retention rates, and reserve considerations. We shall want to continue an intensive study of our manpower policies to see that savings may realistically be made.

On the other side of the ledger, there may be some calls for added U.S. budgetary support of the South Vietnamese economy. There are significant inflationary pressures in that economy and the provision of U.S. resources may be one alternative to consider in alleviating such pressures. This is an area, too, that will require more study; but the trend will surely be to call on more U.S. resources, not less, in tackling South Vietnamese economic problems.

#### *Continued Vietnamization Planning*

The four alternative timetables for withdrawing U.S. forces from Vietnam should be considered as examples rather than as rigid schedules. Choosing among the timetables is, at best, an imprecise business. There are dangers in moving too fast. On the other hand, moving too slowly may give incorrect signals to friend and foe alike. Consistent with an emphasis on flexibility, I believe we should not tie ourselves inextricably to any of the four timetables.

However, I strongly support the JCS position that future troop-deployment planning must be coordinated in advance with the GVN. Experience now substantiates the need for combined consideration of such practical matters as transfer of areas of responsibility, bases, facilities, and the disposition of equipment. Furthermore, to the extent practicable, the governments of the troop-contributing countries should be consulted in order to elicit their cooperation. To accomplish this coordination, we must resort to some timetable as a rough planning guide.

Without question, some elements of the Government of Vietnam, and of other troop-contributing countries, would consider the 18 month and perhaps even the 24 month timetable as too fast. They undoubtedly would prefer one of the longer timetables as a planning guide. On the other hand, if appropriate stress is placed on the strength and purpose of the residual force, and on a clear acceptance of, say, the 24 month timetable as only a tentative target subject to change as required, then agreement should be possible. The 24 month timetable would require the redeployment of about 200,000 U.S. troops by the end of FY

1971. This would place heavy pressure on the GVN and RVNAF, but should cause them to extend themselves in a manner which could have salutary effects. We should remain alert, however, for signs that the pressure is too heavy. Explicit joint US/GVN formulation of an RVNAF replacement plan, coupled with a U.S. residual force plan, should make the pressure bearable.

Confident acceptance by the GVN and other troop-contributing countries of the 18 month timetable with a strong U.S. residual force could also have a salutary effect on Hanoi. If they come to believe that the U.S. expects to maintain a substantial combat support and logistical capability for an indefinite period, they could develop serious doubts about their chances of success in the foreseeable future. If they were thus persuaded to pull back, or even to refrain from expanding infiltration, we could then consider reductions in the residual forces as outlined above.

Just as important as the schedules and timing involved from a military standpoint is the concept of Vietnamization in the broader context. For us to achieve our objectives in South Vietnam, it will be necessary for the South Vietnamese to show more stature and stability in the political, economic, social, and technological areas. As we continue to study the Vietnamization process, as I believe we must, we should expand the scope of the effort to include the broader context of Vietnamization.

I believe, too, that we must try to get a firmer grip on the many areas of uncertainty, and, at a minimum, outline for you in a more definitive way the options available in the areas incident to Vietnamization, the benefits to be expected in pursuing the options, and the costs and risks involved.

#### *Recommendations*

1. We should continue to give the highest priority to Vietnamizing the war, exerting maximum effort to expand, equip, train, and modernize the RVNAF and do whatever else may be required to transfer progressively to the Republic of Vietnam greatly increased responsibility for all aspects of the war.

2. We should proceed, for planning purposes, on the 24 month redeployment schedule outlined by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This schedule appears to offer the best balance among the advantages and disadvantages incident to Vietnamization.

3. Future troop redeployment planning should be coordinated with the Government of Vietnam and with the other troop-contributing countries.

4. Planning should stay as flexible as possible. Recognizing we are now ahead of the redeployment schedule proposed for the 24 month

timetable, we should continue to look for ways to accelerate the Vietnamization program.

5. We should keep the Vietnamization study effort actively in process. Not only should the concept of Vietnamization be broadened to include non-military areas, but the options in the military field on force levels, force composition, and potential budgetary savings incident to all our operations in Southeast Asia should also be vigorously examined.

**Mel Laird**

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### **115. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, September 5, 1969.

SUBJECT

Analysis for Vietnam

Over the past months, I have become convinced of the need for systematic analysis of U.S. policies and programs in Vietnam.

Looking back on our experience over the last few years, it is remarkable how frequently officials have let their preconceptions about Vietnam lead them astray even though a careful and objective analysis of readily available facts would have told them differently. The examples are legion:

—the shortcomings of the Strategic Hamlet Program were obvious to any discerning observer of the rural political and economic situation in Vietnam;

—U.S. force deployments in 1965 were based on intelligence estimates of enemy strength that underestimated it by half;

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 139, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. X, September 1969. Secret; Nodis. Sent for action. Attached but not printed is an August 30 memorandum from Laurence Lynn, Jr., to Kissinger, in which Lynn informed Kissinger that he had revised this memorandum for the President as Kissinger requested. A notation on Lynn's memorandum indicates it was "Hand carried to Pres. 9/4."



—our expectations for the bombing campaign against North Vietnam were overly optimistic;

—our mistaken optimism in 1966 that the North Vietnamese could no longer sustain heavy casualties in the South was completely contradicted by the facts of North Vietnamese demography;

—our excessively optimistic expectations for the various “revolutionary-development” type cadre programs;

—the shock of the Tet offensive was in part attributable to our failure to analyze available intelligence accurately.

I cite these examples because of my concern at the current paucity of analysis on Vietnam at a time when major changes are taking place in our policy.

For example, I believe we should give careful consideration to whether we have marshalled and analyzed all the available evidence on:

—the progress of Vietnamese force modernization and the current performance capability of Vietnamese forces;

—the effect on Viet Cong political activities and the rebuilding potential for Viet Cong local force and guerilla units pursuant to U.S. troop withdrawals from the Delta;

—the real progress, if any, of the GVN toward the implementation of the recently proposed land reform program;

—the extent to which some of our more successful economic assistance programs might allow us to quicken what has been the quite remarkable eroding effect that our economic assistance has had on Viet Cong political fortunes in the countryside;

—the nature of the recently registered gains in pacification efforts and their vulnerability to a decline in GVN–US military capability;

—internal developments following any major U.S. program changes in Vietnam.

We need a special group with semi-permanent status to give continuous direction to the analyses and serve as a touchstone for those in Washington and elsewhere who can make analytical contributions.

One way to accomplish this task is to establish a Vietnam Special Studies Group under my chairmanship on the model which has worked so well with the Verification Committee and the Intelligence Estimates. The group would include representatives from OSD, JCS, CIA and State with other agencies represented as appropriate. It would sponsor analytical efforts of the type I’ve mentioned and provide for the circulation and discussion of the results within the government. As appropriate, these studies and the issues they raise would be forwarded to you or to the NSC.

*Recommendation:*

I recommended that you approve the establishment of a Vietnam Special Studies Group chaired by the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and with appropriate representation from the agencies.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Nixon initialed the approve option. This decision was institutionalized in National Security Decision Memorandum 23, September 16, which created the VSSG. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 363, Subject File, NSDMs) Noting that he met daily with a Vietnamization working group under Nutter and there already was an Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam, Laird asked Kissinger in a letter of September 22, "Is such a group [VSSG] necessary in view of ongoing efforts?" (Ibid.)

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**116. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, September 5, 1969.

SUBJECT

Preliminary Analysis of the Significance of the Death of Ho Chi Minh

Ho's death will deal a blow to North Vietnamese morale, although it probably will not by itself soon lead to a softening, or significant change, in North Vietnamese policies toward the war in the South.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 69, Vietnam Subject Files, Death of Ho Chi Minh. Confidential. Sent for information. The memorandum was not initialed by Kissinger; a note on the memorandum reads: "Hand carried to the President, 9–6–69." Kissinger's assessment is in part based on three papers, all undated but probably written on September 3. They are entitled "NSC Staff Analysis," "CIA Analysis," and "State/INR Analysis." (Ibid.) Ho Chi Minh died on September 3.

<sup>2</sup> In a September 9 memorandum to Kissinger, Holdridge wrote that "with little to go on save gall" he and the NSC staff were attempting to estimate the trend in the DRV even before Ho Chi Minh was laid to rest. Holdridge acknowledged that the DRV leadership was collective and "that none of the big four in the politburo: Duan, Chinh, Giap or Dong is strong enough to grab the controls completely at the outset," but he believed that "over the long pull, we are inclined to guess, and it is only a guess, that Le Duan will gradually consolidate his power position." Holdridge agreed with most other observers that "DRV policy after Ho will almost certainly have to gravitate in the direction of moderation," but he was not sure that these shifts would provide grounds for progress from Washington's point of view. (Ibid., Box 139, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. X, September 1969)

Four men appear to be the most likely candidates to succeed Ho as Party leader, although there is very little hard information concerning factions or policy differences within the top leadership. In order of position within the Party, they are:

—Party First Secretary Le Duan, 61: Duan has enjoyed a close personal relationship with Ho, but has almost certainly lost some of his influence in the past year.

—Theoretician and National Assembly Chairman Truong Chinh, 61: He is considered to be the most pro-Chinese of the top leadership, in the sense that he has apparently favored modelling North Vietnamese policies along Chinese Communist lines.

—Premier Pham van Dong, 61: Dong has long been closely associated with Ho. He is reputedly more moderate than the others.

—Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap, 57: Like Ho, Giap has great popular prestige because of his role in the victory over the French.

Of these, Chinh and Le Duan are believed to have the inside track.

Le Duan is known for his policies of sacrificing everything for the struggle in the South. Chinh, Giap and probably Dong advocate a cautious, steady application of the tactics of the “people’s war” and simultaneously the preservation of the strength of the regime in the North and building it up along orthodox Marxist lines.

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### 117. Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, September 10, 1969.

SUBJECT

Our Present Course on Vietnam

I have become deeply concerned about our present course on Vietnam. This memorandum is to inform you of the reasons for my concern. It does not discuss alternative courses of action, but is provided for your background consideration. You know my recommendations.

While time acts against both us and our enemy, it runs more quickly against our strategy than against theirs. This pessimistic view

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-024, Special NSC Meeting Folder, 9/12/69, Vietnam. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. This memorandum is printed in full in Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 1480–1482.

is based on my view of Hanoi's strategy and the probable success of the various elements of our own.

### *I. U.S. Strategy*

In effect, we are attempting to solve the problem of Vietnam on three highly interrelated fronts: (1) within the U.S., (2) in Vietnam, and (3) through diplomacy. To achieve our basic goals through diplomacy, we must be reasonably successful on *both* of the other two fronts.

#### *a. U.S.*

The pressure of public opinion on you to resolve the war quickly will increase—and I believe increase greatly—during the coming months. While polls may show that large numbers of Americans now are satisfied with the Administration's handling of the war, the elements of an evaporation of this support are clearly present. The plans for student demonstrations in October are well known, and while many Americans will oppose the students' activities, they will also be reminded of their own opposition to the continuation of the war.<sup>2</sup> As mentioned below, I do not believe that "Vietnamization" can significantly reduce the pressures for an end to the war, and may, in fact, increase them after a certain point. Particularly significant is the clear opposition of many "moderate" leaders of opinion, particularly in the press and in the East (e.g., *Life Magazine*). The result of the recrudescence of intense public concern must be to polarize public opinion. You will then be somewhat in the same position as was President Johnson, although the substance of your position will be different. You will be caught between the Hawks and the Doves.

The effect of these public pressures on the U.S. Government will be to accentuate the internal divisiveness that has already become apparent to the public and Hanoi. Statements by government officials which attempt to assuage the Hawks or Doves will serve to confuse Hanoi but also to confirm it in its course of waiting us out.

#### *b. Vietnam*

Three elements on the Vietnam front must be considered—(1) our efforts to "win the war" through military operations and pacification, (2) "Vietnamization," and (3) the political position of the GVN.

(1) I do not believe that with our current plans we can win the war within two years, although our success or failure in hurting the enemy remains very important.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Nixon underlined this sentence.

<sup>3</sup> Nixon underlined this sentence.

(2) “Vietnamization” must be considered both with regard to its prospects for allowing us to turn the war over to the Vietnamese, and with regard to its effect on Hanoi and U.S. public opinion. I am not optimistic about the ability of the South Vietnamese armed forces to assume a larger part of the burden than current MACV plans allow. These plans, however, call for a thirty-month period in which to turn the burden of the war over to the GVN. I do not believe we have this much time.

In addition, “Vietnamization” will run into increasingly serious problems as we proceed down its path.

—Withdrawal of U.S. troops will become like salted peanuts to the American public: The more U.S. troops come home, the more will be demanded. This could eventually result, in effect, in demands for unilateral withdrawal—perhaps within a year.

—The more troops are withdrawn, the more Hanoi will be encouraged—they are the last people we will be able to fool about the ability of the South Vietnamese to take over from us. They have the option of attacking GVN forces to embarrass us throughout the process or of waiting until we have largely withdrawn before doing so (probably after a period of higher infiltration).

—Each U.S. soldier that is withdrawn will be relatively more important to the effort in the south, as he will represent a higher percentage of U.S. forces than did his predecessor. (We need not, of course, continue to withdraw combat troops but can emphasize support troops in the next increments withdrawn. Sooner or later, however, we must be getting at the guts of our operations there.)

—It will become harder and harder to maintain the morale of those who remain, not to speak of their mothers.

—“Vietnamization” may not lead to reduction in U.S. casualties until its final stages, as our casualty rate may be unrelated to the total number of American troops in South Vietnam. To kill about 150 U.S. soldiers a week, the enemy needs to attack only a small portion of our forces.

—“Vietnamization” depends on broadening the GVN, and Thieu’s new government is not significantly broader than the old (see below). The best way to broaden the GVN would be to create the impression that the Saigon government is winning or at least permanent. The more uncertainty there is about the outcome of the war, the less the prospect for “Vietnamization.”

(3) We face a dilemma with the GVN: The present GVN cannot go much farther towards a political settlement without seriously endangering its own existence; but at the same time, it has not gone far enough to make such a settlement likely.

Thieu's failure to "broaden" his government is disturbing, but not because he failed to include a greater variety of Saigon's Tea House politicians. It is disturbing because these politicians clearly do not believe that Thieu and his government represent much hope for future power, and because the new government does not offer much of a bridge to neutralist figures who could play a role in a future settlement.<sup>4</sup> This is not to mention his general failure to build up political strength in non-Catholic villages. In addition, as U.S. troops are withdrawn, Thieu becomes more dependent on the political support of the South Vietnamese military.

*c. Diplomatic Front*

There is not therefore enough of a prospect of progress in Vietnam to persuade Hanoi to make real concessions in Paris. Their intransigence is also based on their estimate of growing U.S. domestic opposition to our Vietnam policies. It looks as though they are prepared to try to wait us out.

*II. Hanoi's Strategy*

There is no doubt that the enemy has been hurt by allied military actions in the South, and is not capable of maintaining the initiative on a sustained basis there. Statistics on enemy-initiated activities, as well as some of Giap's recent statements, indicate a conscious decision by Hanoi to settle down to a strategy of "protracted warfare." This apparently consists of small unit actions with "high point" flurries of activity, and emphasis on inflicting U.S. casualties (particularly through rocket and mortar attacks). This pattern of actions seems clearly<sup>5</sup> to indicate a low-cost strategy aimed at producing a psychological, rather than military, defeat for the U.S.

This view of their strategy is supported by our estimates of enemy infiltration. They *could* infiltrate more men, according to intelligence estimates, despite growing domestic difficulties. The only logical reason for their not having done so is that more men were not needed in the pipeline—at least for a few months—to support a lower-cost strategy of protracted warfare. It seems most unlikely that they are attempting to "signal" to us a desire for a de facto mutual withdrawal, although this cannot be discounted.<sup>6</sup> There is no diplomatic sign of this—except in Xuan Thuy's linkage of points two and three of the PRG program—and I do not believe they trust us enough to "withdraw" a larger percentage of their men than we have of ours, as they would be doing.

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<sup>4</sup> Nixon underlined most of the first three sentences of this paragraph.

<sup>5</sup> Nixon underlined this sentence beginning here to its end.

<sup>6</sup> Nixon underlined this sentence.

Hanoi's adoption of a strategy designed to wait us out fits both with its doctrine of how to fight a revolutionary war and with its expectations about increasingly significant problems for the U.S.<sup>7</sup>

### III. Conclusion

In brief, I do not believe we can make enough evident progress in Vietnam to hold the line within the U.S. (and the U.S. Government), and Hanoi has adopted a strategy which it should be able to maintain for some time—barring some break like Sino-Soviet hostilities. Hence my growing concern.

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<sup>7</sup> Nixon underlined this sentence.

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## 118. Memorandum From John Holdridge of the Operations Staff of the National Security Council to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>

Washington, September 10, 1969.

### SUBJECT

Positions of Key US Officials on a Ceasefire in Vietnam<sup>2</sup>

Following is a brief summary of the known views of officials who will attend the NSC meeting on September 12.

Secretary of State Rogers: He favors a US initiative for a cease fire in which the main condition would be prior agreement *in principle* on the withdrawal of external forces and on the South Vietnamese working out a political solution themselves. Once this agreement was signed, an international body would be established and a cease fire would take effect. He believes this position might be acceptable to the North Vietnamese. Rogers also thinks that we must begin to work out a detailed position on a cease fire since the issue may soon come very rapidly to the forefront.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), H-024, Special NSC Meeting, 9/12/69, Vietnam. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information.

<sup>2</sup> On August 28 Kissinger sent the President a 22-page paper on a cease-fire in Vietnam. Although Nixon wrote "excellent analysis" on the covering memorandum, the paper contained none of the President's characteristic underlining or comments.

Secretary of Defense Laird: So far as we can ascertain, Laird has no strong views one way or another on a US cease fire initiative. He recognizes the problem which would be posed by an enemy cease fire initiative, however, and is in favor of immediate planning on a detailed allied cease fire position. He is said to believe that a cease fire is most likely to come about tacitly with the Communist side gradually slowing down its offensive operations in which case he is said to believe we should respond by cutting our own offensive actions.

Ambassador Bunker: He is in favor of consulting soon with the GVN on a cease fire in order to be prepared for any enemy initiative. He does not favor our taking the initiative, but believes that our response to the Communists should be to accept a cease fire in principle pending satisfactory resolution of the "circumstances" which would make a valid cease fire possible. These circumstances basically involve prior agreement on the withdrawal of external forces, and adequate provision for verification of that withdrawal and for the supervision of the terms of the cease fire.

Philip Habib of the Paris Delegation: Habib is said to favor a US initiative for a cease fire, but does not believe it has much chance of acceptance by the enemy. He would condition implementation of the cease fire to prior agreement on the withdrawal of the NVA and adequate arrangements on supervision.

General Abrams: He, of course, is primarily concerned with the adverse military implications of any cease fire which does not provide for adequate disposition and control of the NVA and VC forces. Like Bunker, he strongly favors tying a US initiative, or our response to an enemy proposal, to prior agreement on NVA withdrawal and to very careful and complete terms on supervision of the cease fire. We have no recent reading on the details of Abrams thinking, but at one point he was in favor of starting with a cease fire in one area (e.g., the DMZ sector) as a test proposition.

CINCPAC, Admiral McCain: We have no reliable reading on McCain's current position, although in the past he has been in step with General Abrams in opposing any cease fire which did not provide adequately for allied security and the disposition of the enemy forces. If anything, he is probably to the right of General Abrams on this aspect.

CIA Director Helms: He is unlikely to take any position on a cease fire, since he believes his role is not that of policy formulation. If pressed for his view, he would probably favor a cease fire conditioned to prior agreement on withdrawal and adequate supervision.



119. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, September 11, 1969.

SUBJECT

Vietnam Options

Attached is a paper analyzing alternative Vietnam policies. It is provided for your background reading for the 9:30 a.m. meeting on Vietnam on Friday, September 12.<sup>2</sup>

Four options are considered:

- Maintain essentially our *current strategy* across the board;
- Accelerate *negotiations* while maintaining essentially our current Vietnamization policy and moderating our military tactics;
- Accelerate *Vietnamization* while maintaining essentially our current negotiating approach and moderating our military tactics;
- Escalate* militarily while maintaining essentially our current negotiating approach and halting the Vietnamization process.<sup>3</sup>

**Attachment**

*I. Basic Elements in Vietnam Policy*

In formulating alternative Vietnam policies there are three basic components which we can vary: our *negotiating strategy*, which includes

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-024, Special NSC Meeting, 9/12/69, Vietnam. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information. This memorandum was not initialed by Kissinger, but on another copy there is a handwritten indication that Kissinger signed it. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 91, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnamization, Vol. IX, September 1967–December 1969)

<sup>2</sup> Document 120.

<sup>3</sup> According to a September 24 memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, the President met with Laird and Mitchell on September 24. Kissinger wrote that the meeting was “an intimate discussion on Vietnam. I believe we are still faced with the four basic options [as outlined in this memorandum]. . . . You will want to discuss each of these options, focusing primarily on the pros and cons of proceeding with military escalation on November 1.” Kissinger continued that he was “inclined to believe that accelerated Vietnamization would be a road to swift disaster. Thus, we appear to find ourselves at a cross roads which suggests that we must look intensively over the next several weeks at the alternatives of accelerated negotiations or sharp escalation of the type visualized in the Duck Hook Plan.” (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 45, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Vietnam Contingency Plan, Sept–Oct 1969) Duck Hook was an NSC-generated contingency planning operation ongoing in September. Brief notes of meetings between Kissinger and his staff on Duck Hook on September 10, 12, 20, 24, and 29 are *ibid.* Nixon met with Laird, Mitchell, and Kissinger from 10:03 a.m. to 12:44 p.m. on September 24. (President's Daily Diary, September 24; Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files) No memorandum of conversation of the meeting has been found.

both the type of political settlement we seek and the way in which we negotiate these questions in Paris; our *Vietnamization policy*, which includes the criteria and timing for our troop withdrawals; and our *military tactics*, which include both how and where we fight and the signals we send.

By varying the emphasis on these components, four basic alternative routes emerge. We can:

1. Maintain essentially our *current strategy* across the board;
2. Accelerate *negotiations* while maintaining essentially our current Vietnamization policy and moderating our military tactics;
3. Accelerate *Vietnamization* while maintaining essentially our current negotiating approach and moderating our military tactics;
4. *Escalate* militarily while maintaining essentially our current negotiating approach and halting the Vietnamization process.

We have to consider these alternatives in light of present realities and the major targets of our strategy.

## II. *The Current Situation*

We are thus heading toward autumn in uncertain fashion. Is there political significance to the lull? If so, how do we take advantage of it without demoralizing our own forces and perhaps risking greater casualties? Can the Thieu regime stand up to more political compromises? more extensive US troop pullouts? If we cannot move further on both these fronts, which fork should we take to maintain American public support without undermining the GVN's position? What is the most critical time-buying factor for the American people—lower casualties, progress in Paris, US disengagement? What is the impact of each of these factors on the other?

All three Vietnam participants are feeling pressures. The enemy has suffered heavy losses. Their leadership is apparently divided over their strategy and whether or not to explore negotiations. The GVN simultaneously tries to placate US opinion with negotiating reasonableness and its own supporters with soothing interpretation of its proposals and reassurances that it will not budge further. We are torn between the impatience of war-weary Americans and a commitment to reach a just settlement.

## III. *Three Audiences*

Our Vietnam strategy is directed at three basic audiences: the enemy, the GVN, and the American people. Our purposes are to:

- convince the *enemy* that they have nothing to gain by waiting;
- reassure the *GVN* that we will negotiate and disengage at a pace that should allow it to compete politically and militarily with the other side;
- maintain the support of the *American people* for an honorable outcome to the war.

The enemy's negotiating attitude, the situation in South Vietnam, and the endurance of American opinion of course interact. The other side's willingness to negotiate seriously will be keyed largely to his perception of American staying power and the political and military evolution in SVN. Competing forces in South Vietnam, and most particularly the uncommitted, all weigh and reflect both the bargaining process and the stamina of the American people. US public opinion will be heavily influenced by progress—or lack of it—in Paris and the ability of the GVN to hold up militarily and politically.

A. *The Enemy*

It is very difficult to assess the other side's intentions with regard to negotiations. We do not know whether Hanoi and the NLF will be willing to negotiate a settlement that we can accept or whether they intend to await the collapse of the GVN or American stamina.

—Enemy internal propaganda documents point to autumn negotiations.

—The substantially reduced infiltration pipelines might be a signal of a coming willingness to negotiate, including the question of de facto withdrawals.

—There may be significance in the reduced level of hostilities and enemy-initiated actions recently, as well as Hanoi's release of three American prisoners in connection with July 4.

—The PRG might have been established to allow the NLF to negotiate a political settlement as equals.

—There have been second hand private hints in the past that some members of the present GVN government, including Thieu himself, might be acceptable in an eventual sharing of power.

—The enemy might fear that Vietnamization, by gradually reducing US presence and lowering casualties, could maintain American public support while the GVN is successively strengthened.

—The other side may be persuaded that we are prepared to be reasonable in negotiating a political settlement, that Thieu will be obliged to yield and that therefore negotiations might yield a satisfactory solution.

*There are other strong arguments suggesting that the enemy is not serious about negotiations:*

—They have insistently demanded a coalition government, overthrow of the GVN, and the unconditional withdrawal of US troops.

—To date they have flatly rejected Thieu's election proposals.

—They still refuse to talk to the GVN in private on political matters.

—The creation of the PRG, in this context, might confirm a retrogression from the bombing halt understanding that the other side would talk to the GVN.

—The enemy's reduced military activities, rather than being a negotiating signal, could well be designed only to induce us to speed up our troop withdrawals while they cut down their own casualties.<sup>4</sup> Once our withdrawals have progressed significantly and have picked up strong momentum, the enemy might resume military pressures and continue to stonewall the Paris talks.

—They might well believe that time is on their side—they need only sit tight, make sufficient attacks to keep US casualties up, maintain a negotiating facade, and wait for the American people to force an unconditional US pullout or a face-saving agreement. (The Clifford article might have served to reinforce this view.)<sup>5</sup>

—The enemy basically mistrusts negotiations, given their 1954 and 1962 experiences where they believe they achieved less through the negotiating process than their battlefield position warranted.

There is, in short, enough conflicting evidence to suggest that there are sharp differences within the enemy's leadership over negotiating strategy. *The crucial factor remains whether they can be persuaded that they can better pursue their objectives through negotiations than through waiting.*

#### B. The GVN

The Thieu regime is squeezed politically between our pressure for negotiating concessions and pressure from conservative supporters to stand fast. It will be squeezed militarily between the Vietnamization process and enemy threats. Furthermore, the Army leaders and other elements whose support Thieu needs to make the RVNAF more self sufficient are precisely the ones who resist political concessions. Thus our continued pressing of Thieu on both negotiating positions and troop replacements could prove contradictory and too much for the GVN to bear.

*Clear assessments of the GVN's current military and political position are very difficult.*

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<sup>4</sup> Although there is no indication on the memorandum that the President saw it, this sentence was apparently underlined by Nixon.

<sup>5</sup> Clifford's article, published in *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 47, (July 1969), pp. 601–622, was entitled, "A Vietnam Reappraisal: The Personal History of One Man's View and How It Evolved." Clifford called for withdrawing 100,000 U.S. troops by the end of 1969 and all U.S. ground combat troops by the end of 1970. Clifford recalls the article and the reaction to it in *Counsel to the President: A Memoir* (Random House: New York, 1991) pp. 607–609.

*The RVNAF has been growing stronger in size if not in quality.*

—While we can measure progress in numbers of men and equipment, we have great difficulty assessing motivation, aggressiveness, leadership skills.

—Desertions remain a major problem—very high recent levels can only partly be explained by the expansion of the armed forces.

—There has been sufficient improvement to allow replacements of US forces up to perhaps 100,000 without serious military impact.

—Beyond that range, even with heavy US support, we cannot be sure of RVNAF performance against both the VC and continued North Vietnamese presence.

—We can be sure that the enemy will seek to inflict defeat on both withdrawing US troops and their South Vietnamese replacements in order to sabotage the Vietnamization rationale.

*We still do not have any precise understanding of the extent to which the GVN is making progress in increasing its control of the countryside.*

—In response to NSSM 19 on Internal Security, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, supported by State and CIA, reported that pacification is not making sufficient progress and would not unless there were radical changes in the program. JCS and MACV dissented, arguing that substantial advances were being made.<sup>6</sup>

—More population has been brought under GVN control, partly because of emigration to the cities, but the stability of recent gains remains in doubt, especially in the contested, category C, hamlets.

*The political situation is as uncertain as the related military and pacification aspects.*

—The Thieu government has been the most stable since Diem, has been somewhat broadened, erected a constitutional framework and conducted elections. Thieu has launched efforts to coalesce non-communist groups to compete with the NLF, both under his NSDF banner and in a “loyal opposition.”

—In future political competition the tightly organized and disciplined NLF would hold major advantages over the splintered non-communist forces. Many of the latter remain skeptical about Thieu’s intentions and prefer to jockey for future positions of power rather than join together against the communists.

—Thieu’s election proposals have stirred a good deal of opposition in South Vietnam, both within the government and the Assembly. Many people believe his proposals have gone too far, that the other side is sitting still while the GVN does all the moving under American

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<sup>6</sup> For a summary of the response to NSSM 19 see Document 94.

pressure. Perhaps ominously, Vice President Ky recently met with various leaders outside the government like “Big Minh” and Senator Don Thieu and Foreign Minister Thanh have backed and filled on the election proposals in statements designed to calm such reactions.

*We, of course, have means to reassure Thieu and strengthen his position, but they risk our objectives with our other audiences, the enemy and the American people.*

—We can relax our pressures on Thieu to make *political compromises*, thus solidifying his political support among many elements in Vietnam, especially those needed to carry off the Vietnamization process. However, this course risks stalemate in Paris and protest from Americans seeking a negotiated settlement.

—We can drag out the *troop replacement* program, thus bolstering the GVN’s military position. *However*, this would postpone the withdrawal of all non-South Vietnamese forces from the country and feed dissent in the United States.

—We could *escalate* militarily against the enemy, lifting the morale of the RVNAF and many of the GVN’s supporters. *However*, this policy could stiffen the enemy’s morale as well as hurt it, and it would inflame American public opinion.

### C. *The American People*

We are well aware of the popular pressures for a prompt settlement of the war and the consequent time limitations placed upon the Administration in carrying out its strategy. There are several ways in which to buy time with the American public:

- Pursue a manifestly reasonable negotiating track in Paris;
- Phase out American presence in South Vietnam;
- Attempt to lower our casualties further by modifying our military tactics;

—Convince the American people that the Allied position in South Vietnam has improved, the enemy’s position has deteriorated, and that therefore time is actually on *our* side if only we have the patience.

Sooner or later we can expect popular pressures to mount once again. It is not clear what mix—if any—of the above factors will purchase enough time to work out an honorable settlement. The first three of the factors carry potential problems with our other audiences, the GVN and the enemy:

—*Being forthcoming in Paris* means extracting concessions from the GVN which could lead to Thieu’s overthrow by dissident generals and other conservative elements. At the same time we undercut our bargaining position by appearing overeager to the enemy—they need only sit still and bank our overtures.

—*US troop withdrawals*, if pressed too rapidly, could both undermine the GVN politically and the allied position militarily. Again, the enemy could conclude that it need only wait for our complete withdrawal.

—*Modification of our military tactics*, if not handled carefully, could harm not only our military effectiveness, but the morale of allied forces as well. Furthermore, the enemy still retains considerable control over our casualty levels, no matter what our tactics.

Given the history of over-optimistic reports on Vietnam the past few years, it would be practically impossible to convince the American people that the other side is hurting and therefore, with patience, *time could be on our side*. First of all we are not sure about our relative position—we have misread indicators many times before. Secondly, even if we conclude that the allied military position is sound, we don't know how to translate this into political terms—and the political prospects in South Vietnam are much shakier. Thirdly, the Administration faces an extremely skeptical and cynical American audience—the President is rightly reluctant to appear optimistic and assume his own credibility gap. Finally, to a large and vocal portion of the dissenters in this country, the strength of the allied position is irrelevant—they want an end to the war at any price.

#### *IV. Alternative Policies*

I am listing here our major choices for Vietnam with the pros and cons of each. It indicates that there is no “good” cause, only a judgment running serious degrees of risk.

##### *Option A. Pursue Current Strategy*

Our current strategy aims at keeping two options open: negotiation of a political settlement in Paris and gradual, flexible Vietnamization of the war to permit US disengagement in the absence of a settlement. Our military tactics are designed to keep pressure on the enemy to induce them to negotiate and to minimize our casualties to buy time at home. We could attempt to maintain this overall approach.

1. *Negotiations*. We would continue to emphasize free, fair and supervised elections to determine the future political structure of South Vietnam. The President's May 14 speech and Thieu's July offer would frame our negotiating positions—we would not move further without give by the other side. However, if the enemy proved serious in negotiations we would attempt to use the concept of a mixed electoral commission to bridge the gap between elections and the other side's insistence on a coalition government. Negotiations would then center on the composition, role and powers of the commission(s) and the nature of an international supervisory body. We would stress the GVN's responsibility for a political settlement. However, we would pursue our

private bilaterals with Hanoi on all other questions while refusing to engage in real negotiations on political issues and fully coordinating with the GVN.

2. *Vietnamization*. We would continue to base our troop replacements on the three criteria of enemy response, level of hostilities, and improvement in RVNAF. The President would maintain his flexibility about the pace of withdrawals and would set no fixed timetable.

3. *Military Tactics*. The President's orders to General Abrams would remain essentially the same. The emphasis could be adjusted to cut back on search and destroy missions, except where needed to spoil an enemy buildup and thus reduce American casualties.

4. *Rationale*. The overall rationale for this course would be that we and the GVN were being eminently fair in our offers of political compromise and we neither should not (tactically) nor need not (in terms of world opinion) go further in our negotiating positions without some response from the enemy. We would judge that our present careful urging of Thieu to make political overtures will suffice to give our side negotiating room without seriously hurting ARVN morale or weakening Thieu's position. Similarly, we would view a broadening of the government more as strengthening Thieu's position than detracting from his conservative support. Carefully phased and flexible US withdrawals would attempt to: keep the pressure on the enemy to negotiate; induce greater GVN self-reliance without undermining our ally politically or militarily; and buy us time at home by demonstrating the spinning out of our involvement. Our military operations would still be designed to induce the enemy to negotiate by maintaining pressure on them. A certain modification in our tactics, however, could serve both to lower our casualties further and signal our willingness to explore deescalation.

#### 5. *Problems*

This policy's rationale is sound in many respects. *The fundamental problem is time.*

—If there is not rapid movement in Paris, we just will not have the time with *American opinion* fully to play out this strategy, even if it were finally to bring the other side around to meaningful negotiations. If negotiations do not show faster progress, there will be building pressures in this country for further compromises in Paris or accelerated troop withdrawals or a ceasefire.

—Furthermore *we could face increasing problems with the GVN* in reconciling our objectives of negotiated settlement and gradual disengagement. As noted earlier, pressing Thieu both to be flexible politically (thus alienating conservatives) and to compensate for US withdrawals (for which conservative support is needed) could run into serious contradictions. We—and Thieu—might be better off if we



concentrated either on negotiations or on Vietnamization alone, relaxing our pressures on the GVN on the other front. (Options B and C explore this concept.)

—*Our emphasis on free elections may never be attractive enough to the other side.* The enemy is clearly suspicious of any elections within a GVN framework, no matter how that framework is loosened and modified. Every election held in Vietnam has been won by the people conducting it. The other side probably assumes this will continue to be true, despite sweeteners like mixed electoral commissions and international supervision. Indeed they have recently gone out of their way to denigrate such elements.

—Even if we were to get over these hurdles and the NLF and Saigon were to begin negotiating in good faith, *they are not likely to reach an early settlement unless there were great outside pressure on both sides.* Our Vietnamization program and our veiled threats of escalation are probably not sufficient to bring that pressure.

*Option B. Accent on Negotiations: shift negotiating emphasis to territorial accommodation, maintain flexibility on Vietnamization, and moderate military tactics.*

This alternative assumes that the enemy might be willing to negotiate seriously on terms short of allied capitulation. We would attempt to draw them into an earnest search for a settlement through further diplomatic and military flexibility.

1. *Negotiations.* Over the next few weeks we would make a concerted effort to draw the other side into negotiations on elections, suggesting our flexibility on the concept of a mixed commission. Assuming this does not prove fruitful, we would then shift our approach in an attempt to accelerate negotiations. Given the other side's distrust of elections and our side's dismissal of an imposed coalition government or peace cabinet, we would try to work toward a settlement through a ceasefire in place. A ceasefire/territorial accommodation approach would be more likely to force or entice the other side to talk to the GVN on political matters. However, under this strategy of emphasizing negotiations, we would also be prepared to talk bilaterally to the DRV about political issues.

2. *Vietnamization.* We would pursue essentially our present approach, maintaining flexibility on pace, refusing to set specific targets. We might slightly increase our withdrawals if the criterion of lower level hostilities persisted, but we would not commit ourselves to a timetable.

3. *Military Tactics.* These would be designed to encourage mutual deescalation and negotiations without endangering our forces. We would thus respond to the continued lull by restricting some of our

own operations. We would attempt to generate a series of reciprocal deescalatory steps. Such a process would move us de facto toward a ceasefire (or ceasefires) and territorial accommodations, in tandem with our negotiating approach.

4. *Rationale.* The overall rationale for choosing this policy would be to explore the possibilities of negotiating a settlement in Vietnam, both through our diplomatic efforts and military tactics. We would continue to use US troop presence in SVN as a bargaining counter in this process. Under this approach of territorial accommodation, the situation which has existed for many years in South Vietnam would be given a measure of legal status. Many villages in South Vietnam have never been under GVN control, and the NLF has controlled some of these. The NLF also has some measure of influence, recruitment and tax power in other villages. Territorial accommodation would invoke implicit acceptance of the status quo and would seek to rule out efforts to change it by force. The NLF and the GVN would retain control over the territory and population in South Vietnam they now dominate. Power would be shared in contested areas.

The most effective way to arrange such an accommodation would be to negotiate or move tacitly toward a ceasefire in place. (A separate paper on ceasefire in place fully explores the military, territorial and political consequences of a ceasefire; the enemy and GVN attitudes; the direction in which a ceasefire is likely to drive a settlement; and the likely evolution in the absence of a settlement.)

We would be acknowledging the *other side's* concern about elections and would be emphasizing our willingness to allow them to share power in South Vietnam. Territorial accommodation should hold many attractions for them, both in terms of short range consolidation of local power and a longer term shot at national control. There could be local elections to ratify de facto control. They might be willing to try this settlement route and make concessions to speed our withdrawals.

We would be pressing the GVN on political compromises but maintaining the assurance of a carefully phased Vietnamization process based on the three criteria. We would continue to support the GVN so long as it made honest efforts for a political settlement. We would gamble that two elements would prevent the collapse of the regime despite accelerated pressures for a compromise sharing of power and the political implications of a ceasefire/territorial accommodation: (a) our moderately phased withdrawal, providing support over a considerable period, and (b) the knowledge among restive anti-communists in SVN that another coup would prompt us to wash our hands of Vietnam.

We would be buying time with the *US public* by being forthcoming in the Paris negotiations and moderating our military tactics, as well as continuing a careful phasing of troop withdrawals. Mutual

deescalation and lower casualties would help to preserve domestic support. If, indeed, a general ceasefire in place were put into effect, the psychological effect on American opinion would probably give our policy a major new lease on life. With loss of life ended, pressure to agree to communist demands would be greatly reduced (although, with hostilities ended, there might be pressure to bring US troops home).

#### 5. Problems

*The fundamental problem is that the other side may not in fact be prepared to accept any settlement which does not meet all of its current terms. As already noted, we may not be able to involve the Soviets.*

*—Persuading the GVN to follow this route will be most difficult.* Thieu is already encountering great resistance by some elements to his election proposals. A shift to territorial accommodation, no matter how veiled, would acknowledge lack of GVN authority in large parts of the countryside. This would stir even greater dissent and perhaps cause the GVN to collapse.

*—Thieu might find a way to resist and undermine the negotiations by making clear his refusal to cooperate. If he went along and the other side did not respond we will have pushed Thieu to make compromises to no avail. His government could be weakened and our relations severely strained, making the Vietnamization process more difficult.*

*—The US public would be increasingly anxious for prompt US withdrawals if the stalemate in Paris persisted.* We would then be faced with a choice of either negotiating a coalition government or greatly accelerated and disorderly withdrawals. Even if the territorial accommodation course generated negotiating movement we might still be faced with pressures for accelerated troop withdrawals.

*—If we did reach a compromise settlement, we would be much more closely wedded to it.* A settlement based on territorial accommodation would be ambiguous and risky—if it turned sour we would be all the more responsible for engineering a fake peace. In short we would repeat the Laos solution.

*Option C. Accent on Vietnamization: maintain essentially the current negotiating approach, set a fixed Vietnamization timetable, and moderate military tactics.*

This alternative suggests itself if we are convinced that the other side has no intention of negotiating anything short of the GVN's demise and unilateral US pullouts.

1. *Negotiations.* We would continue to stick by the principle of elections, paint the other side as obstructionist and refuse to go further on political offers than the President's May 14 speech and Thieu's initiative on elections. At Paris we would refuse to talk to the DRV about political questions and insist on GVN involvement, either bilaterally with the PRG or in four-party talks.

2. *Vietnamization*. We would set a specific timetable for withdrawal of all US combat troops. We would make clear our intention to withdraw support forces later but could maintain some flexibility on these. We would attempt to strike a balance in our withdrawals between enough speed to satisfy American opinion, and enough deliberateness to allow a reasonable chance for GVN survival. We could move toward a primarily “volunteer” army in Vietnam as our forces dwindled.

3. *Military Tactics*. We would increasingly leave these to the GVN as we turned over more and more responsibility to it. In practice our operations would be moderated as our forces dwindled. Our principal concern would be to effect orderly troop replacements and minimize American casualties. We would continue to supply air, artillery and logistic support to the RVNAF over a considerable period.

4. *Rationale*. The overall rationale for this alternative would be that we had essentially fulfilled our commitments to South Vietnam, and the GVN should now be able to stand by itself after a phased period of withdrawal.

We would tell the *other side* that our election-centered proposals represented the most forthcoming positions we could put forward without any meaningful response on their part. If they wished to speed up our withdrawals, particularly of support troops, they would have to talk realistically about political matters, or withdraw their own forces. They would be faced with the possibility that we might be able to satisfy public opinion in the US with specific troop withdrawal targets but that the timetable might give the GVN a chance to put its house in order so as to compete.

We would present the GVN with a timetable first for the withdrawal of all US ground combat forces, e.g., in two years, and then for the withdrawal of much of the remaining US forces over a second two year period. We would, within reason, provide any economic or military assistance requested. The GVN would be essentially on their own but we would provide significant, if declining, support over a period that should equip and train them to defend themselves even against North Vietnamese aggression. We would tell Thieu that we were not asking him to make any further concessions publicly or privately. We would leave the diplomatic, political, and military initiatives to the GVN.

We would be emphasizing to the *US public* the prospects of definite US disengagement over a fixed period, instead of a reasonable negotiated settlement which the other side’s attitude made very unlikely. An increasingly “volunteer” and decreasingly draftee army would further blunt war criticism. In explaining our fixed withdrawals, we would stress our lengthy commitment, the GVN’s growing strength and our phased support with minimum loss of American lives. Under this alternative we would not need to involve the *Soviets*.

In short this policy has the great advantage that the initiative is largely in our own hands.

#### 5. Problems

—*The enemy would probably attempt to embarrass our withdrawal process by stepping up attacks on our forces, to keep our casualties high, and on GVN forces, to belie their supposed improvement.*

—*The Saigon regime's strength might quickly unravel once our policy is made known.* Indeed, some observers believe that the Saigon government is likely to collapse rather quickly if we moved forward with fixed Vietnamization in the absence of a political settlement or a ceasefire or NVA withdrawals. Withdrawing 250,000 US ground combat forces in two years could drastically cut into the GVN's territorial control not only in contested rural areas but also in outlying urban centers. There could be an agonizing military and political downspiral with increasing US domestic pressures to cut and run.

—Even if the situation held up better than this, *many in the US and other countries might simply construe our actions as abandoning South Vietnam* and renege on our pledge to permit the South Vietnamese to freely choose their own political future. This would erode the credibility of US commitments, could encourage increased subversion in Asia, and would greatly complicate our efforts to construct a balanced post-Vietnam Asian policy.

#### D. Escalation

This alternative is in a sense a variant of the option emphasizing negotiations. Military escalation would be used as a *means* to a negotiated settlement, not as an *end*, since we have ruled out military victory. We would halt escalation as soon as it produced diplomatic results.

#### 1. Negotiations

We would not be prepared to go beyond the current allied proposals without some enemy reciprocity, although we might hint of further flexibility if the other side proved reasonable. We would make clear that our patience was running thin in the face of enemy inflexibility in Paris and the absence of genuine Soviet attempts to move their allies. We would go to the Soviets with what we would term our best offer and tell them that we considered our positions eminently fair, that we were prepared to give and take, but that there would be no more unilateral give. We would expect them to use their considerable influence on Hanoi to induce the enemy to negotiate. If there were not prompt progress in Paris we would conclude that the other side was not prepared to be reasonable without further military pressure. We were prepared not only to exert such pressure but to reconsider our bilateral relations with the Soviets in other fields. The choice for them would be clear.

## 2. *Vietnamization*

We would halt troop replacements. At first we would not publicly confirm such a freeze in our withdrawals. We would simply not announce or suggest further pullouts, clearly signalling the other side as we awaited their response to our threat of escalation. Once it was clear that there was no response in Paris, we would make public our decision to halt the withdrawal process pending reasonableness from the enemy. We would thus conserve all remaining ground forces—and probably supplement our air and naval forces—in order to carry out escalation.

## 3. *Military Tactics*

We would not repeat the process of slow escalation designed gradually to increase the pressure on the enemy to negotiate. This would probably work no better than it did in recent years—militarily it would not hurt the enemy enough, psychologically it would coalesce their forces and people rather than disheartening them. Instead we would move decisively to quarantine North Vietnam through such actions as blockading Haiphong Harbor, resumption of bombing in the north (including close to the Chinese border) and stepped up pressures against third country trade with Hanoi. We would simultaneously pursue the war in the South with maximum air and ground efforts. We might move into Laos and Cambodia.

## 4. *Rationale*

We would turn to escalation only when we were convinced that no other measures, including the threat of escalation, would induce the other side to negotiate or erase their impression that time is on their side. The record would be made as clear as possible to the world and American opinion: we were willing to withdraw our forces and see genuine free political competition among the South Vietnamese, but the North refused to pull out its forces and the PRG insisted on the destruction of the GVN in advance of political competition. Our choice is then between abject capitulation (whether or not veiled by false rhetoric) and the reluctant resort to force in order to make the enemy negotiate.

We would emphasize to all three audiences that our aims remained limited, that we were not seeking military victory, that escalation was solely designed to engineer a fair negotiated settlement. Thus the *enemy* would be given a choice between widespread destruction and mutual compromise in Paris. They need not choose between military victory and defeat. Whereas limited and gradually accelerated bombing of the north united the North Vietnamese people and did not decisively affect the north's war potential, a comprehensive quarantine might break their will as well as their economic and military potential. The GVN's morale would be lifted, but we would emphasize clearly that

we were not seeking a victory for them. They would still be expected to earn future political power on their own. Our most difficult audience would be the *US public*. We would need to erase any impression that we were now going for military victory. To the great majority of Americans who through realism or war weariness have ruled out a decisive ending to the war, we would need to reaffirm our limited goals, underscore enemy intransigence, and demonstrate that the only alternatives were endless stalemate or humiliation.

As for the *Soviets*, this policy assumes that they could influence Hanoi and would be willing to do so rather than see the war escalated. We would calculate that the Soviets would prefer to lean heavily on Hanoi, despite the costs in terms of world communist leadership, rather than to choose between large scale destruction of their ally and the danger of a direct US-Soviet clash.

#### 5. Problems

There are many problems associated with this policy but I will not concern you with them in this paper because they are being fully staffed elsewhere.

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## 120. Minutes of National Security Council Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, September 12, 1969.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-109, NSC Minutes, Originals, 1969. No classification marking. No drafting information appears on the minutes. An aside in the text indicates that this account was probably based on notes by Haig. The minutes contain incomplete sentences, which are noted by question marks within parentheses. Occasionally the editors have suggested possible text within brackets when it seemed logical and plausible. No other record of this meeting has been found. According to the President's Daily Diary, the following attended this NSC meeting in the Cabinet Room at the White House from 9:24 a.m. to 1:15 p.m.: Nixon, Agnew, Rogers, Laird, Mitchell, Wheeler, Helms, Bunker, Abrams, McCain, Habib, Kissinger, and Haig. (Ibid., White House Central Files)

The meeting began with a briefing by Director Helms.<sup>2</sup>

He showed the Council photographs of the collective leadership, including Vice President Thang, Le Duan, Truong Chinh, Pham van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap.

Director Helms: They decided on this leadership as an interim solution before Ho's death. The dominant personalities will be: (1) Le Duan and Truong Chinh. Le Duan is the First Secretary. He is 62 years old. He was a Viet Minh leader in the early 50's. He has been listed as the second most important hero. [(2)] Truong Chinh is the party theoretician. He is a propagandist and has been First Secretary. Since 1960 he has been the No. 3 man. He is a doctrinaire fanatic. (3) Pham van Dong. He is 63 and a close associate of Ho. He became premier in 1955. (4) Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap.

Le Duan may be on the decline. Giap and Truong Chinh may form a cabal. All will seek to show their allegiance to Ho.

The September campaign consists of shelling and limited local ground assaults. High points were on August 11–12 and September 4–5. We expect no marked departure from economy of force tactics, which have been forced by losses on the battlefield.

In Paris, they may seek to reestablish private contacts. Ho's death may permit them to shift their position.

The bombing halt may test the new leadership. There is a question of how long Ho's death will have an impact. It will not:

- change North Vietnam's goals
- change North Vietnam's neutral stance in the Sino-Soviet dispute
- end the leadership struggle.

The nationalist appeal will fade and they will put greater stress on Marxist doctrine.

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<sup>2</sup> In a September 11 memorandum to Nixon, Kissinger stated that "a series of ten to fifteen-minute briefings" had been prepared, and that he recommended that he open the meeting by introducing the briefers in the following order: "1. Dick Helms (situation in North Vietnam in the wake of Ho's death). 2. General Abrams (military situation). 3. Ambassador Bunker (political situation). 4. Phil Habib (status of Paris negotiations)." (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 139, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. X, September 1969) In another memorandum to the President on September 12, Kissinger suggested yet more definitive topics for the NSC meeting later that day. Kissinger wrote that in addition to the briefings, he thought the meeting "should be comprised of a far-ranging discussion on Vietnam" and that two specific issues, "the second replacement increment under the Vietnamization Program and the general topic of ceasefire" ought to be covered. Regarding the cease-fire, Kissinger wrote: "I believe we should encourage full, frank, and open exchange of views" and that "regardless of your intentions with respect to this subject, I recommend that you do not make a decision at this meeting so that you will maintain flexibility and control." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-024, Special NSC Meeting, 9/12/69, Vietnam)



They will not go to higher levels of combat.

The President: Any questions?

Mr. Kissinger: A brief statement on Hanoi's thinking: There was a question of military versus political, and they are trying to get political. (?)

The President: General Abrams will speak next.

General Abrams: The framework is that infiltration is low. Truck traffic in Laos is at an all time low. If you lay it out in a cyclic pattern of years, we are now at a regular low ebb. But there is a lower total of 96,000 this year.

North Vietnamese imports of trucks since January have been higher than during the same period last year. POL imports are high.

The 559th transportation group in Laos had moved out cadre. They have now come back—1900 of them. Within the past few weeks we found a POL pipeline in Laos, along the DMZ.

It is clear to me that Hanoi has prepared itself for the dry season to use the Laotian corridor as in the past.

Enemy total strength at the beginning of 1969 was 257,000. It is now 230,000.

Since January 1, 1968 they have added 90 battalions. They now have 344 battalions. The bulk of expansion is North Vietnamese. The average strength of the battalions is smaller, from 390 to 240.

They have expanded the structure at the expense of the party. We think this suggests intensified and more pervasive political warfare. And this structure also could accommodate a surge of manpower.

In South Vietnam the threats are:

(1) To the DMZ area. They have made no major effort to date. There has been harassment by fire and small units. But the enemy's presence is at its maximum today with a total of 16 infantry battalions and five artillery battalions in the DMZ area alone and below the river. There are more units further North. We are entering the rainy season in the DMZ now. It dries out in January 1970.

(2) In the III Corps Saigon area. There are four enemy divisions in the area. A division has been added in recent weeks, with two regiments, artillery and sappers.

(3) Two regiments have moved to IV corps from III corps—one NVA and one VC (75% NVA fillers). Both have moved into the Delta. They thus may be strengthening their position in response to a deteriorating situation for them. The North Vietnamese soldiers don't get along with the Southerners and are having some problems. (?) heavy unit (?) for the balance of the year seeking high points followed by periods of rehabilitation. An important time will be the (?) early 1970 situation.

Also, ARVN continues to improve modestly but steadily. On balance, troop reduction so far has had a good effect on the ARVN—at least for the bulk of them. It has strengthened their determination and confidence. This effect is not overwhelming but our troop reduction has at least had a positive effect on the South Vietnamese military.

The President: (? [asked a question about a GVN operation])

General Abrams: It had a good effect. Two regiments moved South. Duc Lap is now under South Vietnamese control. I hope in a way that the battle develops.

Mr. Kissinger: In the next 9 months can one see a possibility of the NVA ([beating?]) up an ARVN unit to show that Vietnamization is[n't] working?

Ambassador Bunker: Thieu believes this.

Secretary Laird: Ben Het did.

General Abrams: They don't know, however. They hit Kontum heavily six months ago. I thought they believed it would be at the Fourth Division. There was no public knowledge that Kontum was a GVN or ARVN responsibility. The real purpose was casualties against the U.S. 4th division.

General Wheeler: In that area in the past they went to Cambodia. This time they reinforced, and then (?).

The President: What is the type of ([infiltration?]) of (?) in October, November and December?

General Abrams: At the end of each calendar year it has dropped off. The cycle is the same, although not the degree.

The President: And what about these months?

General Abrams: It declined in October, November and December.

The President: There is a necessity of a political decision. This is a political necessity.

The President: I don't buy the lull consensus. It is what we want to see. Do you think our casualties will be lower in November, December and January?

General Abrams: Right. They will build in January, February and March and April.

The President: What is your report today on the situation with regard to the effect of troop withdrawal on the morale of U.S. forces?

General Abrams: I have seen none.

The President: What about the refusal situation?

General Abrams: This has happened before.

The President: Any grumbling?

General Abrams: So far, no discernable effect.

The President: I address this question to General Abrams and Director Helms: What is morale like in Hanoi? I saw last month's report. As a result, the quality of their forces recedes.

Director Helms: It is about the same. There has been no change.

The President: We hear that troop withdrawal has encouraged some Vietnamese and has discouraged others. Are the North Vietnamese bothered by withdrawals?

Director Helms: I think they want us out.

The President: What about the quality of the North Vietnamese Army?

General Abrams: There are two categories. In III Corps their quality has dropped due to casualties. But in the DMZ area and Ashau area they have time to train hard. They always do very well there. They can go back North. In the South, their deterioration is real.

The President: There has been a change in infiltration totals. 45 percent of (?). Do you see significance in this?

General Abrams: There has been a change in tactics towards small unit attacks to conserve manpower. Something (?) was good this year and they won't need as many men.

The President: Why?

General Abrams: We are not sure if it is a necessity with (them?) or if it is a conscious decision.

The President: All this bears on the interpretation of what have been lower casualties by the North—whether because of political change or because of necessity.

My point is that in October, November, and December infiltration will be important. It could be for Paris. You think it is going to be low in the next three months?

General Abrams: Yes. But they are targeted against U.S. casualties. 50 percent of the total effort is to try (?). The ([gap?]) between U.S. casualties this year and last year is significant. It has not succeeded.

The President: Back to infiltration: you believe that infiltration is designed to support their tactics, but they have missed, and their casualties have been greater. How do our casualties compare in the first 8 months of 1969 with those of the first 8 months of 1968?

General Abrams: They are below, but not much. (The figures then listed in the notes are clearly inaccurate.)

General Wheeler: The enemy is losing more than he figured. The enemy thought he would save more but he hasn't.

The President: I think we are not seeing a real lull. This situation is consistent with a change in tactics, etc. Except that infiltration will have to be stepped up. We must get moving then. (?)

Mr. Kissinger: Are there any changes we are not picking up?

General Abrams: This is possible but we have just started.

Mr. Kissinger: Why did we not pick that up?

General Wheeler: Since the bombing halt, we have seen the railroad go down to the south of Vinh. They move now by ([rail?]) and barge. This bypasses the ([trail?]). We receive fewer reports.

Mr. Kissinger: Does this mean we may (?)

Secretary Rogers: My view is on the figures which are combined; in March it started to drop. May, June and July were all the same. We have had five months drop. This was much different from (?) I think this is significant. So does the intelligence community.

The President: They did this last year too. But 148,000 (?) in 1968 versus 50,000 in 1969 is different.

Secretary Laird: The figures are OK but the interpretation is not.

Secretary Rogers: Assuming the new intelligence is correct, will they be able to conduct the same kind of war with fewer men?

General Abrams: I think they can.

The President: In 1969, 200,000 North Vietnamese were killed and only 50,000 out of the pipeline. So they are in for trouble. It will hurt.

General Abrams: Considering the DMZ units and (?), they get replacements we don't count. We must add these to the infiltration figures.

The President: We must watch October, November and December.

General Abrams: I would like to say that they have problems. Saigon was a target in 1969. They put in ten new regiments through March. They wanted Saigon. Then Tay Ninh. Now they are at Loc Minh in the (?) and rubber plantations. On our side their structure is thinly manned and they can take more people.

Secretary Laird: There is no question about the intelligence figures.

Secretary Rogers: It would seem that enemy forces have dropped more than ours. They can reinforce but . . .

The President: We have to look at the figures in the next 3 months.

Ambassador Bunker: In Thieu's statement on July 1 he went as far as he could go. It caused uneasiness. He has been several months ahead. Your July 30 visit dispelled this. You said he had gone as far as he would or should go.

The next push was the troop reduction line. This has been constructive but can go either way depending on (?) and the rate. So far this, is so. (?) If it is too fast it will cause a collapse. If done by your criteria, it would be a constructive development.

With regard to Phase II of pacification, Thieu wants to expedite it in intensity and in area covered. It has gotten off to a good start and

has moved ahead of schedule. The year-end goals will be met by October 31. Fifty percent of Hamlets were A or B by the end of July. General Abrams's support has been extremely potent. Less and less of the population is under the VC—86% are relatively secure, 5% are under the VC and 7% are in contested areas. (AH: [Al Haig] This adds up to 98%.)

Thieu is conscious of the need for the political contest to come.

I will next speak about the government reorganization. Thieu had 3 objectives:

- to achieve a majority in both houses and improve relations with the army.
- to improve the effectiveness of the government.
- to broaden its base.

The first has been done; there has been progress in the second; but only partial success in the third. Some Buddhists declined to cooperate, as did Tran van Don. But the cabinet is better than the press indicates and the base is broader. The Vice President was a 1969 candidate. Two parties are represented in the government, as (?) in the Deputy Prime Minister. In general it is an improvement. The problem was in finding a successor to (?) that he tried to get a civilian but couldn't find one. Thieu was told that he would be criticized but he went ahead with the military man anyway. The new Prime Minister, Khiem, is a Southern Buddhist and a good man.

With regard to enemy intentions, the lull is more a political act but has been (?) by our actions. Losses are up for June, July and August. Defections are up. They have suffered 65,000 losses.

(There was then an interruption in note taking.)

Secretary Rogers: (?) (?) think he will have to when he does it.

The President: Will Thieu expand his base further?

Secretary Rogers: Not for a while.

The President: He is inhibited by these factors.

Secretary Rogers: We bring in the opposition. Why can't he? Even as advisers.

Ambassador Bunker: He will do this.

Secretary Rogers: Big Minh.

Ambassador Bunker: (?)

Mr. Kissinger: To what degree is their failure to enter the government due to a fear of joining till they know it is a winner?

Ambassador Bunker: To some degree. They also (?) (?) jobs open.

The President: This was also true in the United Kingdom with Churchill.

What did Thieu and his colleagues think about this lull business? For five years we have been kidding ourselves. The statistics have been wrong. It is to our interest for the U.S. to say there has been a lull in reaction to our initiatives. I know this. But the point is we have got to grapple with the facts, the real world. I am impressed with the drop in infiltration. This means something. Director Helms says that morale is down. There are more reports than ever of this.

There were inaccurate reports in 1965 and 1966 that ARVN was good. But the point now is has there been a change? Our program (?) has not changed very much. The bombing will have been stopped for a year in November. They have done nothing unless these figures mean something. What about this?

Ambassador Bunker: A change in tactics is (?) (?). They need to conserve their forces, but there has been no change in their ultimate objectives. They will try to encourage us to withdraw and then come back when we are down from higher levels.

The President: What about General Abrams?

General Abrams: I have the same view.

The President: I don't see there is any argument. But how do we use this change? There are three wars—on the battlefield, the Saigon political war, and U.S. politics. At home here it would be great to lower the level of forces and reduce casualties because I am doing it in (?). We can use this but we must know what we are doing. We shouldn't confuse our policy with the U.S. political dialogue. Can we survive (?) I am not criticizing—there has been a change.

Mr. Habib: I can't report real progress. There have been 30 plenary and 10 private significant meetings. The character of the plenary meetings is quite clear. They push the 10 points and strongly demand that we get out and overthrow the GVN. The 10 points can be drawn down to U.S. unconditional withdrawal and a coalition government. We have emphasized our May 14 propositions and July 11 statement.

At the private meetings there has been no give at all. The style is different. They stress the 10 points, especially the 2 above.

They continue to refuse to deal with the GVN. We have offered bilateral and quadrilateral but they have refused these. They have not reacted to our probes. They have adopted a strategy of waiting us out. They might do this even if they were willing to negotiate. We have probed the lull but have gotten no reply.

The President: When?

Mr. Habib: Two and one half months ago, and it has been repeated. We have never had an answer.

The President: Do you think they are hung up on face?

Mr. Habib: No. They are interested in the facts only. We gave a signal in December.

The President: I had a talk with Rusk months ago. He spoke strongly on the understanding. He said (?).

Secretary Rogers: There was no agreement. We find no proof.

The President: We got nothing but talk. Rusk said they knew.

Mr. Habib: They understood but didn't agree.

Secretary Rogers: There was no agreement just an understanding. They are probing our position. No (?) issues have narrowed.

We believe the fundamental issue is that if they go for a political settlement withdrawal is then solved. They want to prejudice Saigon's response.

They want to continue the Paris plenary and private meetings.

The President: Why?

Secretary Rogers: They don't want to seem to be in bad faith before world opinion, and they get advantages in Paris with our press—Kraft, etc., with regard to their own propaganda.

The President: Do they want a settlement?

Mr. Habib: If they get what they want. And then a ceasefire . . .

Mr. Kissinger: Also in your technical meetings, they were rigid.

Mr. Habib: We have put forward reasonable positions. The talks give us direct communications.

Secretary Rogers: Also, because our position is reasonable, they see it and the world sees it. Our image is much better.

Mr. Habib: Exactly. Our willingness to negotiate and settle is creditable.

Secretary Laird: This was true with the President's and Thieu's speech, not at Paris.

Secretary Rogers: Suppose they hit the cities, etc. Could we raid the North successfully? Would it mean much?

General Abrams: Any operation shorter than a couple of weeks would not be favorable.

The President: Suppose it was in new terms, with all targets open. One third of their supplies are in Haiphong.

General Abrams: In terms of their supplies, they have got lots and can get more. It would not be an overwhelming disaster, even if we knock out their powerplants.

The President: The dykes?

Mr. Kissinger: There is nothing that can hurt them?

General Abrams: They can carry on.

General Wheeler: There would be no fatal blow through seeking a no-holds-barred solution in a couple of weeks. Before the halt Haiphong was a base. Now they are revetted. The port works well. It would take time and good weather to inflict a blow which could do the job. The powerplants are back revetted, walled, etc.

The President: Would you have stopped the bombing if you had to do it again?

General Abrams: No.

The President: Why?

General Abrams: The pressures would have mounted in Hanoi. They were in real trouble. They pulled units out because they couldn't support them.

The President: Dick, do you think they were in trouble?

Director Helms: Yes, but we can't determine what would have happened if the bombing had continued.

Mr. Habib: It was our view that they were focused on our domestic problem.

The President: Habib suggested that we talk about ceasefire. Bunker has been concerned about how we could do this. When we met with Thieu on his July statement we promised no more moves without give from the other side. Could Thieu take this talk?

Mr. Habib: We think we should begin to discuss this with the GVN. Then we looked at the possibility of offering a ceasefire.

Ambassador Lodge thinks it may be of value depending on your plans and in the light of pressures this fall. You must judge this. (?) seems you would have gone (?) the road toward peace.

It is in this framework in which (?).

We think it should be a general offer, providing we later accept the details in negotiating (?).

With regard to the question of whether it should be a public or private offer, Ambassador Lodge thinks it should be public. Then there are those who believe it should be private and then public.

The President: Ambassador Bunker, what do you think? I believe we should talk about the pros and cons.

Let's get to what Habib says. Since November 1 the enemy has done nothing. We have given up the bombing for nothing. We gave our May 15 offer, and what have we gotten? What would Thieu say? Be candid. The Kalb story—he was in contact with the enemy. Let's have the ([real?]) answer, with no diplomatic language.

Ambassador Bunker: I believe it would depend on the character of a ceasefire. Without enemy withdrawal it would be impossible. I would do nothing but restate our offers. Ambassador Lodge wants



to go further. Thieu can't go along with that unless we get firm conditions:

- mutual withdrawal
- no enemy capital on Vietnam territory
- no suspension of pacification
- rights to GVN movement
- means to deal with terrorism
- cessation of infiltration
- the people can move freely
- restoration of the status of the DMZ.

The President: You have already done that, haven't you?

Mr. Habib: In double talk.

The President: I understand. Lodge wants a simple statement. Then they say yes, then what?

Secretary Rogers: If you assume they say no, then you get a public opinion advantage. We shouldn't propose it but we should talk about it.

Ambassador Bunker: Especially if the enemy (?). We must have an agreed position. We could then look into the pros and cons of a preemptive ceasefire, then get an agreed position.

Secretary Rogers: (?) we have done last (?). We should think it through. We should not do it now. We should talk to Thieu in his own terms.

Mr. Habib: Our position in Paris is that (?) have conditions—preemptive or responsive. Their Foreign Minister raised this question. They are concerned we are up to something.

The President: General Abrams?

General Abrams: I find it a very difficult thing to contemplate, Mr. President. I feel I know the situation in South Vietnam but not elsewhere. Where we are in South Vietnam is due to the application of raw power. That is why the enemy is where he is, why pacification has moved. Why all (?). When you turn off the power you have got an entirely new ball game.

The President: But with the conditions.

Secretary Laird: Why not accept the enemy's offer and then negotiate and prolong them.

The President: (?)

General Wheeler: If we had a frontal war we could do so. In this war where the enemy is pock-marked in the countryside, unless you have verified withdrawal plus other factors, you are giving the enemy the ultimate advantage. To get me to support a ceasefire we must have stringent (?).

The President: You say that a ceasefire and then negotiations is wrong.

General Wheeler: Disastrous.

Secretary Rogers: Why is it more advantageous to North Vietnam than South Vietnam?

General Wheeler: Because they won't live up to it.

Secretary Rogers: Then you are not talking about a ceasefire.

The President: Also, what is the line between fighting and terrorism? 35%?

Director Helms: Also, they are in our ball park.

The President: (?). Now, with regard to Vietnamization, as you know, a case can be made from our public opinion for a complete announcement. There could be a strong case on this. This is the Clifford position—to set a time and then announce it.

The other way is to make it non-automatic, to keep the plans secret, but not the commitment to it. We won't execute it without diplomatic and military progress. (?). Both are key factors but they are different. Mel, what is your appraisal on this? Has there been a change since December? (?).

Secretary Laird: No. We (?) only in March.

The President: Have we given the Chiefs what they want?

We can discuss the military side and it is controversial. We can agree on our residual force 18–24 months from now. It visualizes ultimately no U.S. forces in Vietnam.

Any residual of 240,000 men in 18–24–42 months from now doesn't mean the end of the war. I am concerned about our consultations with the TCC's until our game plan is worked out. We must keep the heat on them to keep giving.

We have a problem here of a U.S. and Congress confident that we are moving forward. I have talked to over 100. They are all asked from their districts when we are going. Paris is not reliable. Announcing this plan is what gives confidence. General Abrams is moving forward rapidly.

The President: What do you suggest? An announcement of the whole program?

Secretary Laird: We all read statistics differently. This must stop. We must all read them the same way.

I am concerned about a 36-hour halt—this is the kind of thing which concerns me. It gives the impression we are drifting.

The President: How long will it take publicly.

Secretary Laird: We have a plan to turn over on (?) percent. Announcements would be based on the success of this plan. It is a plan but no figures. Figures would be a mistake.

We must say we have a program. It would have been better without an August date. (?) We are going forward and will stay with it. Paris is not involved.

Ambassador Bunker: I agree with Secretary Laird. It would be a great mistake to set a timetable. It plays into the other fellow's hands. They could sit tight and wait us out.

Admiral ([McCain]): We have four plans.

Mr. Kissinger: If we go down to 250,000 men in support units, would the combat units be out?

General Abrams: Yes, as long as we have some combat support—air and infantry—to protect it.

Secretary Laird: We have some time but we can't wait until the home front erupts. It can't help but get (?) from Congress.

The President: How about the next package. We buy time with troop withdrawal announcements.

Secretary Laird: We will get criticism of the next package.

Mr. Kissinger: General Abrams, when will these withdrawals start to reduce our casualties? If casualties decline, this makes sense. If not, this makes no sense.

General Abrams: This is tough to predict.

Secretary Rogers: During the bombing pause, South Vietnamese casualties were up and ours were down.

The Vice President: Withdrawals can be regarded (?) confidence or weakening in resolve. Is there something hard-nosed we can do to show this is Vietnamization and not a bug out?

The President: Not really, but, it would be necessary to hit the North. I know there is another side too. We have been taking the tough position but . . .

The Vice President: What about the public if not reality?

The President: I disagree with Mel on (?) critics. The May 14 speech and Thieu's statement opened everything. I doubt it—they will never be satisfied. Next we give a ceasefire, then it could be dump Thieu. We will only lose the war on the third front—at home.

The war is going better. Pacification is proceeding.

At home we have had a lull. First as a new administration, then after the May 14 speech, then with the July meeting. Then there will be the next (?) which won't be enough. There have been too many leaks. The 75,000–100,000 story was a deliberate leak.

Bill, what do you think?

Secretary Rogers: If we are talking about the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* . . .

The President: You can't separate them from Congress, they are largely the same.

Secretary Rogers: I have never seen 40% or more opposed to the Administration. If we confuse that with public opinion, it is a mistake.

Most of the public agree with our moves so far. We get heckled but not too bad. We must convince the people we have a program we will follow. If we go ahead with reductions, we will get public support. But if it looks like a public relations program, they will distrust us.

We haven't much in the way of choices. If they think we are going for a military victory the public will leave us. They must know we have a program. We must be able to move ahead quickly and not be held up each time.

The President: You could make the case. Ike had 55 to 60 percent popularity at his best. Johnson had violent opposition from critics and the press who disagreed with the war. He had opposition within his own party. But he had public support until Tet. The President ([withdrew?]). McCarthy dropped to 30% (?), which had a great effect on his decision not to run again.

We expect opposition from columnists.

We have done very well for the last 8 months. But on the other hand, once they get you on the run, it will move fast against us. Then we lose our position with North Vietnam and the confidence of the GVN. What I am saying is, you either favor or oppose the President's conduct of the war. I think you can buy time.

About Hanoi's sensitivity to a new initiative for peace—when will they be able to take over? (?)

General Abrams: We must have a base out before hitting the GVN on this. We have talked about schedules of troop withdrawals and residual forces. The exchanges have gone well. They talk realistically. I don't think we are bugging out.

The President: Everyone is interested in this. I want total security. We should say it was "a general view of the Vietnam situation." I want no discussion of ceasefire. If asked if it was discussed, we should say "we are not going to discuss that." There should be no comment on troop withdrawal. We are not going to discuss what we discussed. A number of decisions will be announced when they are made.

If asked when an announcement is made, we are going to follow a policy which will not reveal when the next announcement is coming.

This requires discipline. I want the maximum impact geared to Paris, Saigon and elsewhere. It will be (?) based on the criteria people.

There will be a written statement on this.

We must cut out the numbers game, cut out (?), and cut out speculation. There will be no discussion of ceasefire at all.

If there is to be progress on this front we must have Bunker talk to Thieu. Premature discussion would kill it.

In the future we must look at casualty and (?) figures. It may be we will want to take advantage of it.

General Mitchell: I agree with Bill and Mel on the domestic front. But I think they are more concerned about drifting. Uncertainty is what hurts. We should say we have a plan and can do it.

The President: We must read the critics knowing what they are after, but we must watch the deeper theme of the people. I personally think Johnson asked for some of his problems, with the bombing halt and overreaction to the critics.

Secretary Rogers: I don't think we should say anything. Later we should say yes, we have a plan and will tell you when it is ready to be announced.

Secretary Laird: I agree with Bill.

The Vice President: Using the three criteria counters the argument for a timetable.

Mr. Kissinger: We need a plan to end the war, not only to withdraw troops. This is what is on peoples' minds.

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## 121. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to Secretary of Defense Laird<sup>1</sup>

Washington, September 15, 1969.

The President has directed that the Department of Defense should undertake immediately a program to accomplish the following actions with respect to Laos:

—Provide M-16s. (Of a Lao request for 20,000, some 4,000 have been supplied. Provision of the remainder should have a major effect on Lao military effectiveness and morale.)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 545, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. I, to 31 July 1969. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusive; Eyes Only. Copies were sent to Rogers and Helms.

<sup>2</sup> On September 16 at 2:30 p.m., Laird and Kissinger talked on the telephone. Laird mentioned the inability of the Lao forces to absorb weapons and the fact that they were ending up in the Philippines and elsewhere. Kissinger stated "the President was eager to do the maximum possible. He has been putting heat on me." The President complained that he wanted to do something in Laos, but "everyone tells him he can't do it." Laird suggested sending the rifles in increments of 1 or 2 thousand at a time. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 360, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File) In a September 26 memorandum to Laird, Kissinger revised the provision of M-16 rifles as follows: "Provision of 16,000 additional M-16 rifles should be carried out at a rate contingent on the ability of the Lao forces to utilize them effectively. Steps should be taken to expedite the training of the Lao forces in this regard. A monthly

—Provide T-28s for the Lao by shifting them from the Thai and replacing those given up by the Thai. Check the number of qualified Lao pilots and see whether immediate input of more trainees is necessary. If so, initiate an expanded training program in Thailand or elsewhere. Consider the utility of other fixed-wing aircraft or helicopters.

—Ascertain whether more C-47 and C-130 gunships could usefully be deployed.

—See whether logistic and ammunition support to Lao army is adequate, and effect improvement if not. If more pay and allowances would make the Lao fight better, this, too, should be provided.

—Increase artillery support for key points in Laos. Reintroduce a Thai battery or single pieces where they would be able to provide training and also have military value, or institute immediate training for the Lao and prepare to turn over 105's—whichever is better tactically, or even a mix of all. Some artillery support is obviously better than no artillery support, as is now the case.

—Implement better reconnaissance capability and ARDF support on lines of communications into Northern Laos, if lack of information is a limiting factor in our ability to cope. (This may not be so important, with Meo spotters in much of the area.)

The President has asked that you report periodically on the progress of this action program.

**Henry A. Kissinger**

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report of progress should be made." In an attached memorandum to Nixon, September 19, Kissinger explained: "Mel maintains that such an immediate input [of 16,000 additional M-16s to the Lao forces] would exceed the Lao military's ability to absorb due to lack of training, require prolonged in-country storage and risk unauthorized diversions or pilferage of the weapons." (Both National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 545, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. I, to 31 July 1969)

On March 7, 1970, Laird reported to the President on longer term actions developed by the JCS as part of a comprehensive plan to improve the Lao Government's armed forces. (Ibid., Box 546, Vol. VI, February 1970–31 March 1970)

## 122. Editorial Note

In a statement that was subsequently recorded for television and radio broadcast, President Nixon announced on September 16, 1969, that after careful consideration with his senior civilian and military advisers, and in full consultation with the Government of the Republic of Vietnam, he was reducing the U.S. troop ceiling in Vietnam from 549,500 to 484,000 by December 15. This amounted to a 65,500 total reduction in the authorized troop ceiling. Because U.S. units were not usually full strength, the actual reduction was approximately 60,000 troops. President Nixon then reviewed the major peace initiatives his administration had made since taking office: renunciation of a military solution, proposing free elections organized by joint commissions under international supervision, withdrawal of all U.S. and allied troops within a year, no retention of bases, negotiation of cease-fire under international supervision to facilitate the process of mutual withdrawal, acceptance of de facto removal of North Vietnamese troops so long as there were guarantees against their return, acceptance of any political outcome based on free elections, and discussion of the National Liberation Front's 10-point program together with plans put forward by other parties. Nixon concluded, "in short, the only item which is not negotiable is the right of the people of South Vietnam to determine their own future free of outside interference." The President stated that in light of all these proposals, it was time for "meaningful negotiations." (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1969*, page 718)

The day before giving this speech, President Nixon and his Special Assistant Henry Kissinger discussed the Romanian desire to expedite a negotiated settlement in Vietnam. The President thought that the Romanians might prove helpful, noting that "they want to play a big role." The two men then discussed the Vietnam situation in more general terms. According to notes of their telephone conversation, September 15, at 7:30 p.m.:

"The President said in some way, K's hunch may be correct. They can't simply ignore it. [the Nixon speech?] K said if they do, then they really show they are completely rigid or they have no respect at all. The President said then we would have to find some way of getting that respect. K thought they would do something, but the big question was whether they would do enough. They have been clumsy and they have problems. The President thought that was a good point K made that the intransigence dated from the time of Ho's illness. I think there is something to that. K said if they were politically flexible, they would now try to stall us past our deadline. They have made somewhat of a peaceful move. They have a tough problem. The President said right now if they don't want to be clumsy, they should do exactly what you

suggest, to move to give us a tough problem. K said if Xuan Thuy comes back from Hanoi without anything, then we know they are out to break us and he will be back in the next few days. If the long road had a chance of success, they should keep us on it. They always have open to them that once we are down to lower figures, we will lose our combat effectiveness and then they will hit us. The President said we'll see." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 360, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

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### 123. National Security Decision Memorandum 24<sup>1</sup>

Washington, September 17, 1969.

TO

The Vice President  
The Secretary of State  
The Secretary of Defense  
The Attorney General  
The Director of Central Intelligence  
The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

SUBJECT

Vietnam

As a result of the September 12 meeting on Vietnam,<sup>2</sup> the President has directed that:

1. Following Ambassador Bunker's return to Saigon, immediate discussions be undertaken with appropriate representatives of the Government of Vietnam with the purpose of determining specific conditions which the GVN considers essential for acceptance of a "Cease-fire." The discussions should be conducted in response to initiatives already taken by the GVN on this subject and should avoid any hint of pressure by the U.S. Government on the South Vietnamese. The views of the South Vietnamese Government should be forwarded to the President as soon as the discussions permit.

2. U.S. officials refrain from public discussion of "Ceasefire" except as required within the framework of the Paris negotiations.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 363, Subject Files, NSDMs. Top Secret; Sensitive.

<sup>2</sup> Document 120.



3. Future decisions on U.S. troop withdrawals be based on full consideration of the three criteria previously enunciated by the President and decisions will be made on an incremental basis as the situation dictates. U.S. officials dealing with the press should therefore be instructed to avoid speculation on future plans, deadlines or timetables for the reduction of the U.S. presence in Vietnam.

**Henry A. Kissinger**

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**124. National Security Study Memorandum 74<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, September 17, 1969.

TO

The Secretary of State  
The Secretary of Defense  
The Director of Central Intelligence  
The Director, U.S. Information Agency

SUBJECT

Planning for Laos

The President has noted that the next crisis in Laos may come during or before the next dry season starting about November. If the Communists push hard militarily or bring pressure on Souvanna Phouma, they may endanger the political balance in Vientiane or force Souvanna into a compromise which leaves our interests unprotected. In order to forestall that eventuality in so far as possible, and to meet it promptly if it arises, he has requested that the following three inter-related studies be carried out:

A. Prepare a paper as to what our behavior will be if the Communists upset the present fragile stability in Laos. Among others, the following questions should be addressed:

(1) At what point do we decide that we no longer have an interest in preservation of the 1962 agreement?

(2) How can we keep from reaching that point? i.e., are there means within our current level of military involvement to persuade the Communists that it is too dangerous to upset the balance? Can we

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 365, Subject Files, NSSM. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusive; Eyes Only. A copy was sent to Wheeler.

forewarn the Communists—possibly through the co-Chairmen and the ICC—that further aggression of the Muong Soui type will require us to take another look at the Geneva Accords and the question whether the Communists have not vitiated them?

(3) What do we do if the point is reached? Do we move into the Panhandle and deprive the Communists of the benefit which they principally sought? Do we encourage the Thai to move into areas of critical importance to them (e.g. Sayaboury) if the Souvanna Government falls? Do we encourage them to do so directly, or to use the enclave for a Lao Government-in-half-exile? How much backing do we provide?

(4) Or do we simply extract what propaganda advantage we can, via the UN and elsewhere?

B. Prepare a plan of retaliation for immediate execution if the Communists attack another Lao keypoint, e.g. B-52 anti-personnel raids. The plan should offer graduated levels of response.

C. Set forth the means for generating maximum publicity concerning Communist pressures in Laos. This would be intended to—

(1) Raise Communist nerves as to what we have in mind;

(2) Prepare public opinion in the US if we have to do something else in Laos (e.g. use B-52's) and provide some protection against the charge of escalation.

The President has directed that the studies be carried out by the East Asian and Pacific Interdepartmental Group.<sup>2</sup>

The studies should be forwarded to the NSC Review Group by October 10, 1969.<sup>3</sup>

**Henry A. Kissinger**

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<sup>2</sup> In a telephone discussion with Under Secretary Richardson, September 22, at 4:10 p.m., Kissinger stated: "The President has the strong view that we ought to do more in Laos to show the North Vietnamese that they can't use it as a bargaining point in Vietnam. He has asked the bureaucracy what they can do and he always gets a 'no.' He is very restive about this." Kissinger then complained to Richardson that "We have to get Godley to take a more responsive attitude to the President's wishes." Richardson responded that "we need a better understanding of the general policy line" towards Laos, noting that "the situation on the ground there has changed a lot." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 364, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

<sup>3</sup> In NSSM 76, September 27, the President directed that this East Asia and Pacific Interdepartmental Group, a regional interagency sub-group of the Senior Interagency Group, "undertake a thorough review of U.S. policy towards Laos. The study should include full consideration of U.S. objectives and policy options vis-à-vis Laos in light of the various courses of action which might be adopted by the Communists in the area." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 365, Subject Files, NSSM)

**125. Editorial Note**

On September 27, 1969, Assistant to the President Henry Kissinger met with Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin at the latter's request who asked that the White House intervene to arrange an agreement between Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and Secretary of State Rogers on the Middle East. Kissinger had arranged with President Nixon that during this conversation Nixon would call and tell Kissinger to inform Dobrynin that Vietnam was a critical issue in U.S.-Soviet relations and that the Soviet Union should be aware of it. (Kissinger, *White House Years*, page 304) Prior to meeting Dobrynin, Kissinger spoke on the telephone with the President at 3:15 p.m. on September 27. The President told Kissinger: "It is very important to leave no illusions on the decision he has made on the whole Southeast Asia area. It is very important for everyone to realize the whole situation is changed. We would have been delighted to have nice personal relations [with the Soviet Union], but that boat is gone by now, and that is that. He wants to be sure this is understood; and that we reached this conclusion reluctantly." Kissinger stated that he understood. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 364, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

Kissinger met with Dobrynin and informed him that "there was no need for White House intervention" on the Middle East and stated: "that Dobrynin should understand our elemental position. We had made several communications to the Soviet Union on Vietnam to which they had never replied. While this did not inhibit normal diplomatic relations, it made it very difficult for the White House to go beyond what normally occurred on the diplomatic level.

"At this point, the President called. When the conversation was completed, I commented that the President had called me at a providential moment because it enabled me to tell the President directly what was being discussed. To us Vietnam was the critical issue. We were quite prepared to discuss other subjects, but the Soviet Union should not expect any special treatment until Vietnam was solved. They should also have no illusions about the seriousness with which we took Hanoi's attempt to undermine the domestic position of the President. Dobrynin asked me whether there was any hope for a coalition government. I replied that we had covered the subject at great length previously and that I could add nothing. It was a pity that all our efforts to negotiate had failed. The President had told me in his call that the train had just left the station and was now headed down the track. Dobrynin responded that he hoped it was an airplane and not a train and would leave some maneuvering room. I said the President chooses his words very carefully and that I was sure he meant train.

“Dobrynin then asked what our problem had been in the past. I said that every negotiation turned into a discussion on our readiness to accept the 10 points. We could not negotiate in a forum of ultimatums. Dobrynin said that my own conversations with the Vietnamese seemed to have gone rather well. I asked him what he meant. He said Hanoi had told Moscow that they had been very impressed by my presentation and thought I understood Vietnamese conditions very well. I replied that if this were true the next move was up to them.

“Dobrynin then engaged in a lengthy exposition to the effect that the Soviet Union, for its own reasons, was interested in peace in Vietnam and had in the past often been helpful. I countered that we had no illusions about Soviet help in the past. It had been considerably in the interest of Hanoi and had been largely tactical. Dobrynin said that he wanted to assure me of Moscow’s continued interest in improved relations with the U.S., but it was getting very difficult to convince Moscow of our goodwill. There had been no real progress on any subject. For example, we could have been more generous on trade liberalization. I said the most important issue was Vietnam. As soon as Vietnam was out of the way and especially if the Russians took an understanding attitude, we would go further. Dobrynin smiled and said that I had an unusual ability to link things together. I told him that we had hoped to have a reply on SALT. Dobrynin said there would be a reply in due course but did not give any indication as to when.

“Dobrynin returned to the subject of Soviet interest in improving relations with us. I said we reciprocated this feeling, especially after Vietnam was out of the way.” (Memorandum of Conversation, September 27; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin/HAK, 1969 [Part 1])

On October 1 Kissinger sent a brief memorandum to the President assuring Nixon that he had made the four points to Dobrynin: that “Vietnam was the critical issue,” that “there would be no special treatment for the Soviet Union until Vietnam was solved,” that “we took seriously Hanoi’s attempt to undermine the President’s domestic position,” and “the train had left the station and was headed down the track.” Kissinger also informed Nixon that Dobrynin responded that he hoped there might be “some maneuvering room,” that Kissinger’s private conversations in Paris had impressed Hanoi, and that Moscow wanted improved relations with the United States but had not yet seen any progress. (Ibid.)

**126. Notes of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, September 27, 1969, 4:40 p.m.

[Omitted here is discussion of the Dobrynin–Kissinger meeting; see Document 125. They also discussed the Middle East, U.S.–Soviet relations, SALT, the Sino-Soviet split, China, and Romania.]

Getting back to D and Vietnam, P asked K whether he saw much movement. K's response was that the fact that D told him about his Paris conversation, and that Hanoi considers that the most useful conversation they have had, he (K) considers positive. D had said in watching the President's news conference,<sup>2</sup> it was clear the President isn't going to make any major concessions, and that it was useful to get this on the table. K thinks we will get a move within the next month.

P mentioned the demonstrations coming up on October 15. He said the Democratic National Chairman had been meeting with the doves, at the same time of his press conference, to make Vietnam a political issue. P said he didn't hit this hard with Haldeman, but he feels the real attack should be on them. K agreed, saying they got us into the war. P said our people have to start fighting harder. K said the press conference was essential and extremely helpful. He thinks events of the last two or three weeks show the long route cannot possibly work. The President agreed, especially with our 60,000-man withdrawal, reduction of the draft by 50,000, and Ho Chi Minh's death. The doves and the public are making it impossible to happen. He asked K, if in his planning, he could pick this up so that we make the tough move before the 15th of October. K said yes. P said he had been wondering if we shouldn't—he doesn't want to appear to be making the tough move after the 15th just because of the rioting at home. K said there is a problem, however—if Hanoi takes us seriously, and they wouldn't have told Moscow if they weren't taking it seriously, we shouldn't confuse them. If we want them to make the move, we should give them time—two weeks. His only worry is that if we went ahead with the tough move before the 15th—and there is a 10% chance Hanoi might want to move, if we hit them before they have a chance to make the move, it will look as if we tricked them. He said the President might want to consider another press conference before the 15th or a television report, saying "these people (demonstrators, etc.) are dividing the

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking.

<sup>2</sup> Reference is to the press conference of September 26; for text see *Public Papers: Nixon, 1969*, pp. 748–758.

country and making it impossible to settle the problem on a reasonable basis." P said he would just as soon have them demonstrate against the plan. If we went ahead and moved, the country is going to take a dimmer view after the move than before. P would like to nip it before the first demonstration, because there will be another one on November 15. P reminded that Laird had said for three months after we do this, it will have relatively high public support. K said as an assistant, he had to give P the dark side. He suggested again the possibility of P going on television before the demonstration—possibly around Oct 10.

P said okay; they had had an interesting day; and he would see K on Monday. If Rogers calls, P will try to cool off that thing. K said Rogers can be generally positive but defer an answer for two weeks.

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## 127. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, September 29, 1969, 5:23–6 p.m.

### SUBJECT

Planning for Laos and the Sino-Soviet Hostilities Paper (Revision of September 25, 1969)

### PARTICIPATION

Henry A. Kissinger, Chairman

State

Marshall Green

William Cargo

Defense

G. Warren Nutter

CIA

Thomas H. Karamessines

JCS

Vice Admiral Nels C. Johnson

NSC Staff

John Holdridge

William G. Hyland

Colonel Robert M. Behr

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Meeting Minutes, Originals, 1969 and 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room. Colonel Behr sent these minutes to Kissinger under cover of a September 30 memorandum.

*Summary of Decisions*

1. Two papers will be developed on Laos:

a. The WSAG will produce on a priority basis a short-term contingency plan to deal with an anticipated Communist offensive in Laos.

b. The appropriate NSC/IG will produce a report which develops a longer term view of where the U.S. wishes to go in Laos. (This paper can be delayed for a few weeks.)

3. The WSAG will review the short-term contingency plan before October 5, 1969.

The meeting began at 5:23 P.M. Kissinger outlined the purpose of the meeting. The President, he said, is restive about the situation in Laos and is seeking ideas on how to stabilize the situation. What occurs in Laos has a direct bearing on the negotiations in Paris and the security of Thailand. A collapse of the situation in Laos will present him with serious problems—roughly parallel to a similar situation were it to develop in Thailand but without a diplomatic agreement to underpin a U.S. response. The solutions proposed to date have not been particularly useful. Moreover, within the Government there has arisen a reluctance to deal with the problem. While this reluctance may be understandable, it does not provide the President meaningful alternative courses of action.

As a consequence of recent NVN troop movements into Laos and the imminence of the dry season, a short-term contingency plan is needed. This, Kissinger said, should be done on a priority basis by the WSAG. Green was asked to chair this working group. Another, longer term paper setting out where we wish to go in Laos should be developed by the appropriate NSC/IG. This paper can be delayed for a few weeks.

The Group then reviewed the tactical situation in Laos, noting that recent inactivity on the part of NVN/Pathet Lao troops is somewhat anomalous when viewed against a history of years of military pressure predictable both in time and intensity. A number of salient observations were made:

1. The Communist forces were taken aback by unusually effective military operations conducted by the RLG. Particularly damaging was the interdiction and destruction of quantities of matériel.

2. Despite recent RLG successes, the long-term military situation is not good. Any prognosis would have to favor the Communists. They probably have the capability to take Laos but have not done so because they:

a. have generally had free use of the Ho Chi-Minh trail,

b. are unwilling to tempt U.S. retaliation,

c. consider that anti-war sentiment in the U.S. can work toward their objective thereby reducing their incentives to seek a military solution.

3. The Communists will, however, conduct an offensive in the Plain of Jars during the forthcoming dry season. They wish to secure Muong Soui and threaten but not move against Vientiane and Luang Prabang.

Green observed that, while the situation in Laos is serious, it is not altogether gloomy. There have been indications of low morale among NVN forces and there are political options open to Souvanna which might be effective. While he is in the U.S. he can call for serious negotiations with Hanoi, working through UN channels and with the Russians and French. If effective, such moves could inhibit a NVN counter-attack.

Kissinger said that part of the WSAG contingency plan should be an outline of the U.S. approach to Souvanna when he is in the country. He noted that other U.S. courses of action, which represent the current inclinations of the President, have been reported to the departments. These should also be noted in the plan. What needs to be done now is to add new and imaginative political/military options which tend toward a tougher approach than has been suggested heretofore. If the NSC Review Group or the WSAG find that the cons of a harder line outweigh the pros, they are at liberty to so report to the President. But in all fairness, a full range of possibilities must be considered. In that context, and recognizing the President's repeated interest in increased air activity, the option of B-52 strikes in Laos has to be evaluated.

Green then asked Kissinger about the form of the Laos contingency paper.

Kissinger outlined a four-step approach:

1. A brief history of the past few months to serve as point of departure—from a platform of facts.
2. An identification of probable flash points.
3. A catalog of integrated political/military actions (including those now underway) that would tend to deter NVN adventurism.
4. An identification and evaluation of suitable U.S. courses of action, should deterrence fail.

The paper as outlined above should be prepared before Souvanna's arrival on October 7th. Kissinger wondered if the paper could be ready for review by the WSAG toward the end of the week. Green said that his working group would work toward a deadline of October 2nd.

[Omitted here is discussion of the Sino-Soviet hostilities study.]



**128. Memorandum From John Holdridge of the Operations Staff of the National Security Council to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, September 30, 1969.

SUBJECT

CIA Study of the North Vietnamese Leadership<sup>2</sup>

CIA's analytical unit has come up with a very able and lengthy study on possible Hanoi policy and leadership after Ho. Although there are no stimulating new lines of speculation in the piece, it provides a very sound and readable evidential backup for the general views on the probable leadership and policy held at present by most "experts". Unfortunately, no summary of consequence is provided with the study (CIA has somehow gained the impression that you don't like summaries), so we have extracted the main thoughts and conclusions and set them out below.

CIA believes that:

—The leadership in the DRV has long been divided on proper tactics for fighting the war, on the priorities for achieving Communist objectives in SVN, and on the degree to which DRV resources should be contributed to the effort.

—The cautious approach has been pushed primarily by Truong Chinh with the most notable example of his strategy being his report of May 1968. This report, first published in September 1968, had the flavor of a policy approach which had won out after considerable debate. It set forth a prescription for protracting the SVN war (after the great Communist losses of Tet 1968), for emphasizing the withdrawal of the U.S., and of settling on terms far short of maximum goals. Subsequently DRV conduct of the war tended to confirm that Chinh's prescription was being followed.

—Military tactics, for example, changed to a de-emphasis of big unit operations and a renewed effort to strengthen grass roots military units. This continued to the present.

—The adoption of Chinh's line was a rebuke to Le Duan, the other main contender for Ho's mantle who, over the years, has consistently

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 139, Vietnam Country Files, Vol. X, September 1969. Secret. Sent for information. A stamped note on the memorandum indicates Kissinger saw it October 14.

<sup>2</sup> Intelligence Memorandum No. 1851/69, September 24, "North Vietnam After Ho Chi Minh: The Policy and Leadership Implications," attached but not printed.

pushed for a more aggressive strategy in SVN. (This history is ably detailed in the CIA study which also contains an impressive batch of materials showing that Duan was the main author of the Tet 1968 campaign.)

—Chinh's 1968 speech also covered problems on the North Vietnamese home front and developed the thesis that a balance should be reached in Hanoi policy between the twin objectives of building the North and unifying the South. Chinh, always an orthodox hardliner on Communist agricultural policy, pushed for more emphasis on socialization as opposed to private enterprise in this sector. Although socialist practices have lost ground in the pressures of the war, the regime is sticking in theory to Chinh's policy line. Le Duan, on the other hand, has advocated a more pragmatic approach on agriculture.

—On the issue of negotiations and how the DRV ought to conduct them, the positions of the two main contenders for the leadership are not as clear as on other questions. There is nothing in the record to suggest that either one advocates a significantly different approach from that so far followed by the Communists at Paris.

#### *Who Will Win Out*

—In CIA's view the evidence on the leadership lineup since Ho's death shows it about the same as it has always been. Since the regime has turned away from some of Le Duan's policies, however, this may have a bearing on how real power is distributed.

—For now, the regime will try to demonstrate unity; however, the Agency believes fundamental problems of authority cannot be avoided for long. A really functioning collective leadership seems unrealistic, even for the short term. The elements for a bitter party feud are present and could lead to indecisive, ineffective policies, or to a debilitating struggle for power. Unfortunately, no confident prediction can be made on the way it will come out.

#### *How Policy Will Go*

—CIA feels the regime has been moving along new policy lines for over a year. In the DRV these include the slowdown in infiltration, more Marxism in economics, and greater efforts to improve government and party organization. In the South, the combat pace has been slackened and preparations made for the longer haul. At Paris, a new political program and new political organizations have been introduced to help shift the struggle from the military to the political realm.

—Why these steps were taken is not clear: On the evidence, Hanoi could be preparing for a stepup in the war next year, for further efforts at protraction, or for bringing the war to a fairly early conclusion.

—CIA doubts a stepup, primarily because of the lack of physical signs in the South. They also note Chinese Communist distaste for DRV

policy during the past year which suggested Hanoi was seeking less than an all out victory in SVN. (There has been a slight warm-up lately between Peking and Hanoi, at least superficially—see below.)

—CIA thinks Hanoi is preparing both to protract the war if necessary and for an early settlement, perhaps expecting cracks soon in the allied side. They believe this approach will be continued after Ho, although in specific terms, it might take a number of shapes which could unpredictably affect the course of the negotiations.

*Comment:* The Agency's assessment of the leadership seems generally sound to us. We are inclined to think, however, that there is probably very little chance of any significant Hanoi policy concessions in the negotiations during the predictable future. Everything we have seen from the North Vietnamese since Ho's death at least suggests an inclination to stand pat and possibly a hardening of policy. In the latter respect, we are struck by the seeming warmth which is now developing between Peking and Hanoi, a situation which has occurred since CIA's memo was produced. It is true, however, that it has often seemed darkest just before the dawn in terms of DRV policy breaks at Paris.

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## 129. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, October 2, 1969.

### SUBJECT

Contingency Military Operations Against North Vietnam

You asked me to consider alternatives to our present policy in Vietnam. One such alternative is a series of short, sharp military blows

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<sup>1</sup> Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 45, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Vietnam Contingency Planning Sept.–Oct. 1969. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. A handwritten note at the top of the first page reads: "Duck Hook Plan." The memorandum was not initialed by Kissinger and was not seen by Nixon. Kissinger recounts in *White House Years* that on October 17 he recommended the President defer consideration of Duck Hook until Kissinger could assess the rate of infiltration for the remainder of the year. (p. 285) Attached to this memorandum is a September 10 memorandum from R.C. Robinson to Kissinger that outlines responsibilities among the White House staff for preparing contingency plans in conjunction with Duck Hook.

against North Vietnam designed to bring them to serious negotiations and an honorable settlement. This paper is an initial discussion of what this course would involve.

The paper discusses the objective of such a course, the military concept including targets, possible reactions and U.S. counteractions and an index of the other papers.

*The Objective:*

Our basic objective is to give Hanoi incentive to negotiate a compromise settlement through a series of military blows. We initially assumed that such blows might best be delivered at targets directly related to Hanoi's capacity to support the war in the south, the objective of previous bombings. We did not find this feasible, however, and decided that hitting targets of more general strategic importance would be more effective.

Our basic goal subsumes several specific military and political objectives:

(i) To persuade the North Vietnamese, through effective military action, and an explicit willingness to repeat it, that the alternative to compromise is unacceptable damage to their society.

(ii) At the same time, to convey to Hanoi and others that our goal is *not* the total destruction of the country or the regime, which would invite major outside intervention.

(iii) Thus, to present the Soviets and Chinese with actions too limited to justify a military confrontation with us, yet effective and firm enough to forestall circumvention and promote their eventual influence on Hanoi to compromise.

*Accordingly, supporting objectives would be:*

(iv) To impose a substantial physical isolation of North Vietnam and destroy vital targets sufficient to confront Hanoi with military and economic disruption and deprivation, involving costly and time-consuming restoration or countermeasures. Our immediate military objective would be significant impact on North Vietnam as a society—*not* simply a resumption of bombing aimed at reducing their support of the war in the south.

(v) To strike and maintain a political posture clearly immune to all likely pressures against continuing the action so long as Hanoi refuses to compromise.

What we would be saying by our actions is that:

—the NVN demands for our unconditional surrender are utterly unacceptable.

—we will go to almost any lengths to end the war quickly.

—we have decided to give NVN incentives to end the war by compromise sooner, rather than later.

—we will keep the negotiating avenue open, essentially on the basis of our May 14th (eight-point) proposal.

*Military Concept:*

The concept involves a number of air and naval actions, grouped into intense phases of short duration, e.g., four strike days, possibly extended over a week by the variability of the weather. These actions would be markedly different from the previous air and naval operations against NVN, which constituted a spasmodic campaign against targets not in sanctuary and which were primarily related to support of the war in the south. The military actions contemplated in this paper, in addition to being intense over a short term, would (a) be directed against targets of a more strategic nature to achieve lasting military and economic effect, (b) confront Hanoi with a *fait accompli*—that is, the destruction of a significant target which wouldn't require continuous follow-up bombing—and (c) thereby generate strong psychological impact on the DRV leadership.

The basic military action would be the partial isolation of NVN by aerial mining of the six deep-water ports and initial interdiction of the Northeast Rail Line. The sea quarantine would be subsequently maintained by both periodic reseeded of the minefields and continuing air and naval operations offshore against NVN watercraft. Should subsequent phases be required, intensified interdiction of the rail lines or alternate routes would reinforce the isolation of NVN.

The initial mining operation would be accompanied by the near-simultaneous *disruption of the enemy air order-of-battle and attacks upon several groups of critical economic and war-supporting facilities in NVN*. These groups have been selected on the basis that their destruction or neutralization would:

- cause deep psychological impact on the Hanoi leadership.
- signal the return to the hardships and frustration of the earlier bombing period for NVN.
- cause significant physical damage, representing major capital investments and reconstruction efforts.
- halt most modern industrial production.
- prevent most foreign exchange earnings.
- increase sharply the required imports of essential military and economic goods.
- disrupt extensively normal living conditions, public services and transport, and both urban and rural labor forces.

There would then be a pause in major offensive action to await a diplomatic response from Hanoi. During the pause, however, we would probably need offshore air and naval action to maintain the sea quarantine. The level of these actions would depend upon the NVN efforts to sweep or bypass the minefields.

Subsequent phases, if necessary, would deal with NVN reactions to counter or moderate the effects of the first phase, as well as include attacks upon additional critical groups of facilities for increasing impact. At Tab A<sup>2</sup> is a conceptual plan along these lines.

The critical facilities include at least 29 installations in NVN that would be significant targets for attack under this concept. These are, by groups:

- five complexes in the Haiphong port area.
- six electric power stations.
- four airfields (with all but one of the 119 combat aircraft in NVN).
- three manufacturing facilities (cement, machinery, and coal processing).
- five storage facilities (POL, high-value imports and trucks).
- five transportation targets (three bridges, two railyards).
- the levee system in the Red River Delta.

The Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff are currently preparing an integrated plan along these lines. Tab B is preliminary in nature pending receipt of these plans. For illustrative purposes, a sample package of actions which might be conducted over two periods of four strike days each is as follows:

Phase I—airial mining of the six deep-water ports.

- destruction or neutralization of the NVN air order-of-battle (about 120 jet aircraft).
- neutralization of five transportation targets, three of which are associated with the initial interdiction of the Northeast Rail Line.
- destruction of six key electric power plants.
- destruction of five major storage facilities.

Phase II—destruction or neutralization of possibly reconstituted NVN air order-of-battle.

- destruction of key facilities in the Hanoi–Haiphong complex.
- intensified interdiction of a probably expanded NE road–rail–road route to China.
- breaching of the levee system in the Red River Delta.

These actions run the risk of losses of U.S. aircraft (perhaps up to five per cent) and some of their crews, as well as inflicting considerable NVN civilian casualties.

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<sup>2</sup> Attached but not printed are Tabs A–H: Tab A—“Conceptual Plan of Operations;” Tab B—“Assessment of Military Actions;” Tab C—“NVN Actions and U.S. Courses of Action;” Tab D—“Soviet Actions and U.S. Courses of Action;” Tab E—“Chinese Actions and U.S. Courses of Action;” Tab F—“Integrated Diplomatic and Military Scenario;” Tab G—“Draft Presidential Speech;” and Tab H—“Major Questions.”

The probability of success is heavily dependent on the weather, although some portions of the over-all operation could almost always be accomplished. For example, the sea mining could be executed in about an hour during 80 per cent of the days in November and December. Using all-weather aircraft, we could mine in about one day anytime. At the other extreme, however, the weather suited for bombing of the key bridges in the transportation target group occurs about one day out of four in November. Thus, for the sample Phase I, we could expect a high probability of partial success—i.e., the establishment of the sea quarantine—but less chance of accomplishing the desired effect on all the targets within a four-day period. For this reason, some flexibility is required, either in the duration of the phase or in the expected effect on the target groups.

*Actions and Counteractions:*

We have made an initial estimate of possible actions by NVN, the Soviet Union, and the CPR, with possible U.S. counteractions. Below is an indication of what is touched upon in the respective tabs, which I recommend you read.

*North Vietnam* (see Tab C):

We can expect Hanoi to demonstrate extremely tough resistance. Its leadership will make judgments on the basis of our estimated intentions (whether U.S. attacks are an act of desperation or the beginning of a long and persistent campaign, regardless of consequences); estimates of its ability to receive sufficient external assistance to permit a viable economy and estimates of whether its political structure can withstand the strain of a sustained U.S. campaign. Hanoi, thus, is likely to respond with measures designed to exert maximum psychological pressure on the U.S. Administration, threatening to expand the war by calling for foreign “volunteers,” initiating a large-scale anti-U.S. propaganda campaign, suggesting through a break-off in the Paris talks that a peaceful settlement is no longer possible, conceivably stepping up communist military activities in Laos and Cambodia, or even offering a cease-fire.

A movement toward increased NVN military actions will be limited by her ability to develop alternate supply lines through China and a reluctance to call for volunteers.

*Soviet Union* (see Tab D):

The Soviets have always been disturbed by the prospect of the action envisioned in this option, because they would be confronted with a direct challenge and with difficult choices. We can expect them to undertake various efforts to circumvent or mitigate the effect of our actions. They would almost certainly make a major effort to get supplies

to NVN and to replace the losses inflicted on the NVN air order-of-battle. They might provide personnel for various NVN operations, including air defense. We must be prepared to spill Soviet blood and to inflict damage to Soviet ships, if this proves necessary for the effective implementation of our plan. We must also be prepared for Soviet responses outside the area of Vietnam, such as in Berlin. We should expect major political pressures, but the chances of major Soviet pressure to induce NVN toward moderation of her position are no better than even if Hanoi decides to remain intransigent. If Hanoi shows some disposition to move constructively, the Soviets would encourage it since Moscow almost certainly estimates that over time Hanoi can achieve its objectives in the south by political means.

*Communist China* (see Tab E):

Peking will attempt through offers of economic and military assistance and some political pressures to keep Hanoi in the war, but probably will follow its past policy of avoiding overt intervention and a consequent direct confrontation with the U.S. so long as Hanoi's estimated existence as a socialist state does not appear to be threatened. Peking will support Hanoi politically and diplomatically, principally by an intense anti-U.S. propaganda campaign, but will likely move toward an accommodation with the USSR if, as expected, the Soviet response is anything less than acceptance of a full-scale confrontation of its own with the U.S. Peking will return Chinese forces withdrawn from North Vietnam, possibly surfacing them as "volunteers," and will offer South China ports and LOCs to move supplies into the north. Some degree of cooperation with the USSR in supplying Hanoi can be expected. Peking will provide a sanctuary to DRV aircraft diverted from North Vietnam. The Chinese might attempt to stimulate attacks by pro-Peking guerrillas in other Southeast Asian countries in order to divert U.S. military resources. In response, we should inform the Chinese that our operation is not directed against them, but we should maintain pressures on Hanoi regardless of the Chinese role. We do not anticipate that the Chinese will try to prevent Hanoi from seeking an accommodation with us if and when Hanoi decides to do so.

We have identified to date a number of questions which should be answered, or at least considered, in further study. At Tab H we have attempted to list some of the more important questions. Such a paper could be considered a priority work list for additional effort on this alternative course of action.



130. Memorandum From Winston Lord of the Planning Staff of the National Security Council to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>

Washington, October 6, 1969.

SUBJECT

Some Questions on Laos

"A new administration has the right to ask for compassion and understanding from the American people. But it must found its claim not on pat technical answers to difficult issues; it must above all ask the right questions." (HAK, *Central Issues of American Foreign Policy*.)<sup>2</sup>

Following are a few questions on Laos. They are not meant to be comprehensive or to treat all of the border issues and estimates. They seek rather to question some basic assumptions, to reopen closed positions, to look at some of the Laotian elements from a different perspective. The incoming intelligence reports and contingency plans will probably deal with some of these questions. Others will be ignored or assumed away. Several of these questions might be treated by desk officers but not by their superiors who clear the papers and represent their agencies at the crucial meetings.

1. *Does the President really control our Laos policy?*

The normal problems of Presidential control are compounded by the dominant role that the CIA plays in Laos. How autonomous is the

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 546, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. III, 11 October 1969–31 January 1970. Secret; Nodis. Sent for information. Sent through Osgood and a copy was sent to Holdridge. Lake returned this paper to Lord on October 14 and noted in a transmitted memorandum that "Mr. Kissinger asked that we tell you your paper on Laos was a first-class effort which he liked very much. He said it is a model of what he wants the planning staff to do. Note this marginalia." (Ibid.) Haig sent a copy of this memorandum to Kissinger under cover of a memorandum of October 7, in which he wrote: "Attached is a think piece done by Winston Lord on the Laotian situation which is extremely well done, thoughtful and quite worrisome. I believe it is worth your time to read the memorandum carefully since it is one of our better staff efforts and confirms Winston's ability to articulate well. The fact that I wince at some of his attitudes does not detract from the overall favorable impression of his intellectual effort. I think we have in Winston a staff officer whom we can use on some of the tougher expository problems." (Ibid., Box 958, Haig Chronological Files, October 1–15, 1969 [1 of 2])

<sup>2</sup> The quote is from an essay by Kissinger first published in *Agenda for the Nation* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1968), and subsequently republished in Kissinger, *American Foreign Policy: Three Essays* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1969). The quote is from the concluding paragraph of the second essay, p. 97, *ibid.*

CIA in that country? Vang Pao's recent offensives provide just one example. His Meo irregulars have always been a CIA operation. Who has been calling the shots on his overrunning of the Plaine des Jarres—Souvanna Phouma? Vang Pao? CIA? The President? Has Vang Pao license to grab as much territory as he can (with full U.S. support) regardless of the overall policy implications, not to mention vulnerability to counterattacks?

2. *What is the purpose of "our side's" offensives?*

What are we and the RLG trying to accomplish? The standard answers are that we seek to maintain the fragile stability of a divided Laos, that we must punish the enemy for the offensives, that we must maintain the morale of RLG (and Thai). Do these answers explain, for example, the extensive inroads on enemy territory that the RLG made in 1966–67, including the Nam Bac Valley which the communists had controlled for ten years? These offensives evoked little response at first, encouraging the RLG to press ahead, dizzy with success. "By the fall of 1967, the RLG had made considerable inroads on territory that the communists held in 1962. The communists finally responded by turning an RLG offensive in the Nam Bac area into a debacle for the government in mid-January 1968." (SNIE, October 1968).<sup>3</sup> The enemy then went on to administer the worst series of defeats to the RLG since 1961–2. Looking through past NIEs, one sees the same rainy season pattern repeated annually. The RLG takes real estate to compensate for the previous dry season losses and to have more land to be able to give up in the upcoming dry season. Are we clear about the political rationale for these offensives? Do we assess the impact on the other side's moves, particularly when our offensives threaten territory that they have traditionally held? *How do we expect the Pathet Lao and Hanoi to write their own NIEs about our side's intentions when we bend the rules of the game in Laos?* To quote Ambassador Godley, "Laos must be the only country in the world where military success creates almost as many problems as military failure." Do we consider these problems *before* supporting RLG offensives?

3. *Is there a way to break the wet season–dry season cycle?*

With the RLG we are now considering political and diplomatic moves to forestall or divert NVN/PL reaction to our side's recent military successes. This has a familiar ring as one looks at the cables and estimates of past Septembers. And we might expect the same scenario over the next few months as was played out in past dry seasons. Once

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<sup>3</sup> SNIE 58–1–68, "Communist Capabilities and Intentions in Laos Over the Next Year," October 21, 1968, *Foreign Relations, 1964–1968*, vol. XXVIII, Document 389.

the other side is reinforced and their LOC's in order, they will retake territory despite our side's military defenses and possible diplomatic maneuvers designed to dissuade them. Next spring the RLG, with our support, will once again gear up for wet season offensives. One can argue that at least this cycle has preserved a partitioned Laos as a buffer, perhaps longer than many expected in 1962. *But is this cycle sufficient as a continuing policy for this Administration, especially when everyone agrees that the other side holds the military trump cards?* And when the facade of non-war in Laos is being stripped away by a questioning public? Is there a means to break this cycle or do we let it continue mindlessly? Would the other side respond to tactic restraint or diplomatic approaches by the RLG, or would they merely press their advantage? Would attempts to deescalate or ceasefire in place be any riskier than a continuing cycle of offensives and a policy of military deterrence?

4. *How should we judge the NVN/PL intentions this dry season?*

We are now worried about, and busily planning for, dry season drives by the other side. The enemy's traditional motives for a seasonal push have been sharpened by Vang Pao's overrunning of the Plaines des Jarres, including Khang Khay, long considered an important communist center. A new element this year may be the desire to underwrite their recent political demands, first set forth in July 1968 and since amplified. These add up to an insistence that their stooge neutralists, not Souvanna, represent the "center" in any tripartite arrangement and recognition of other "current realities" since 1962, such as changes in territorial demarcations. The more the other side can decimate Souvanna's neutralists, the more it can claim that its forces include the real center, as well as the left, of Lao politics. In addition, Hanoi might tweak us in Laos to make us flinch in Paris. Reading the mood in this country, they probably have less fear of a sharp U.S. military response to their drives.

In this context, there are estimates that an additional 12,000 North Vietnamese troops may be entering Laos. Leaving aside the fact that one might question whether there is a firm basis for such an estimate, this figure corresponds roughly to past NVN movements back into the country as the rains cease. A September 26 State Department INR note<sup>4</sup> says that "Royal Lao military successes in the Plaine des Jarres (PDJ) and in the southern panhandle are, in our estimation, unlikely to evoke a Communist offensive of such dimensions as to fundamentally alter the terms on which the Laos war has been fought since 1962. Nevertheless, we foresee more intense Communist activities in the upcoming dry season than at any time in the past." (This is *not* an intelligence

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<sup>4</sup> National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 546, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. III, 11 October 1969–31 January 1970.

community consensus and forthcoming estimates may be more bearish.) This reflects the evocative, cyclical nature of military moves by both sides as discussed previously. It also recalls past estimates of enemy intentions. Thus an August 1965 SNIE<sup>5</sup> stated that: "Whereas we are fairly confident in our judgment that the Communists probably do not intend to *initiate* any major military action in Laos in the next few months, we are certain that they would *react* vigorously to any offensive in Laos which they felt seriously threatened the infiltration route to the Viet Cong or moved into territories bordering on the DRV and Communist China." The enemy's 1968 response to the RLG offensives in 1966/67 fulfilled this type of prophecy. Given Vang Pao's recent advances in enemy territory, it is not surprising that we once again expect an enemy dry season campaign.

This is not to say that our side is always guilty of provocation, or to ignore the other side's encroachments on RLG territory or to predict that they would necessarily show restraint if the RLG did. Nor is there any assurance that this time the enemy might not have more ambitious offensives in mind, given the factors cited above. Past history does suggest, however, that we should not misread NVN/PL intentions or overreact to their moves. As in the past we need not assume that the communist offensive is designed "to fundamentally alter the terms" of the Laos war. We have always worried that they might, knowing that they could. Clearly political intentions, not the military equation, have governed their moves. "Troop movements and attacks on outposts recently reported in South Laos suggest that Communist forces may soon seize Saravene and Attopeu to further secure the overland route between North and South Vietnam. These major outposts are already virtually surrounded and neither would be likely to hold out long under attack." This was written in a May 1962 SNIE,<sup>6</sup> which went on to suggest that the communists would probably not move immediately on the towns. These southern towns have been surrounded by communist forces off and on ever since—yet they remain in RLG hands.

Such facts are useful to keep in mind as we gauge enemy intentions this time around and plan our reactions. Similarly it is useful to ask *how has the map of Laos changed since 1962?* Reports over the years might give the non-expert the impression that the communists have made steady territorial inroads in Laos since the 1962 Accords. The blending of communist and "neutralist" territory in 1962 and the changing character of the "neutralists" make it difficult to assess net

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<sup>5</sup> SNIE 58–65, "Short-Term Prospects in Laos," August 5, 1965, *Foreign Relations*, 1964–1968, vol. XXVIII, Document 192.

<sup>6</sup> SNIE 58–4–62, "The Current Military Outlook in Laos," May 14, 1962, summarized in *Foreign Relations*, 1961–1963, vol. XXIV, Document 367.

gains and losses. However, the overall picture today, while it has fluctuated, has not basically changed since the 1962 Geneva agreements. The communists hold somewhat more territory in the South while the RLG (as of now, before the dry season) has made some inroads in the North. "There has been *no* significant loss of terrain, and indeed, a net gain, over the situation which obtained in 1964" (William Sullivan to HAK memorandum, June 1966).<sup>7</sup> This fact too should tell us something about enemy intentions, given their military capabilities. These intentions may change but we should not *assume* they are changing when they make their next counter-counteroffensive.

5. *What do we do if the NVN/PL actually push to overrun the Mekong Valley or all of Laos?*

This is the crunch question on our ultimate decision on Laos. It is certainly a legitimate question since all agree that the enemy could make such a drive if they wished. "We continue to estimate . . . that the combined PL/NVA forces now in Laos have the military capability to reduce the RLG area of control to a few enclaves in fairly short order. They could do so without diverting resources from South Vietnam or drawing significant reinforcements from the North." (October 1968 *SNIE*.) Yet all the papers on Laos have avoided the issue of our ultimate commitment to Laos, concentrating on deterrence and intermediate steps. In devising means of deterring the enemy, should we not know what we are prepared to do if such deterrence fails? Indeed should not our tactical moves be made against this strategic background? *Are we prepared to put in 100,000 to 150,000 U.S. soldiers*, the only action that observers believe might be effective in case of an all out enemy push? Would even American troops alter the situation? Or would they achieve only short term victories, pending escalation by Hanoi and the creation of a Vietnam-like quagmire? Our own military advisers oppose the use of U.S. ground forces. Such action would run counter to the thrust of the Guam doctrine,<sup>8</sup> our pullouts from Vietnam and Thailand, the American mood, Cooper Resolution,<sup>9</sup> Symington hearings,<sup>10</sup> etc., etc.

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<sup>7</sup> Kissinger placed a question mark next to this reference; reference should be to a June 1969 memorandum from Sullivan to Kissinger, Document 82.

<sup>8</sup> For the Guam or Nixon Doctrine, see Document 101.

<sup>9</sup> The Cooper Resolution limited U.S. support to local forces in Thailand and Laos to supplies, material, equipment, facilities, and training, thus barring the use of U.S. forces in these countries. It was passed by the Senate in September, but was eliminated from the final bill as passed on November 6, 1969. (Congressional Quarterly, *Congress and the Nation*, 1969–1970, Vol. III, pp. 903–904)

<sup>10</sup> The ongoing Symington Subcommittee hearings on U.S. Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which concentrated on Laos. (*Ibid.*, pp. 908–909)

6. *Should we increase our military support of the RLG?*

A series of measures are being considered to bolster the RLG against coming enemy offensives. The basic premise is that if the enemy's calculations are mixed, some increase in the U.S. input might help to deter them. There are specific questions to be answered about the more modest proposals—can the equipment be used, will the money get to the right people, etc.? The more dramatic suggestions raise the most serious doubts about their military or psychological effectiveness, their political and diplomatic repercussions, their financial costs. There are the problems, already mentioned, about assessing enemy intentions, tailoring our responses, and perpetuating the military cycle. Furthermore, *does any marked escalation by our side make sense in Laos when we know—and the enemy knows—that ultimately we would stop short of sending in American troops?* Raising the ante would appear dangerous when the opponent knows he can raise back until he drives you out of the game. Against the backdrop of the past year's events in Southeast Asia and this country, our opponents must be more confident than ever about this calculation.

7. *How important to us is the bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail?*

This is perhaps as heretical a question as those posed for so long about the effectiveness of our bombing of North Vietnam. Certainly our bombing of the Panhandle punishes the North Vietnamese and raises the costs of their infiltration into South Vietnam. Accurate measurements of the bombing's effectiveness are probably as impossible to get for Laos as they were for North Vietnam. We can expect the Air Force to give us high figures and Systems Analysis to provide low figures. Evidence of the bombing's usefulness is the fact that Hanoi includes this as a precondition to any peace talks on Laos. However, it is absolutely clear that our bombing cannot stop infiltration into South Vietnam, any more than did our bombing of North Vietnam. The recent lower rates of infiltration are due to Hanoi's policy decisions, not our bombing. Hanoi has been and will be prepared to write off whatever costs we inflict in order to infiltrate the men and materials its policy dictates. In this sense the actual degree of our bombing effectiveness is not really crucial. We have to date automatically refused to consider a panhandle bombing halt as part of a package deal on Laos. It is time to question this position. *Would a tradeoff of our Trail bombing for a stabilized Laos and thus a buffer for Thailand be in our interest, assuming such a deal was possible?* How should we weigh the possibility of stabilizing Laos and therefore insulating Thailand against the current impact of our bombing campaign? Could we engineer a package that would be enforceable? Would we consider partial or temporary cessation, with the option to resume if the other side did not uphold its part of the deal?

8. *How much Laotian dirty linen have WE got?*

It would be helpful to be—privately—a little less self-righteous on the question of violations of the 1962 Geneva Accords. It is not a question of blaming ourselves or ascribing benign motives to Hanoi. Certainly their violations are more blatant than ours—they have 48,000? (we don't really know and it depends on the season anyway) regular troops in Laos, while our role is essentially supportive and often reactive. The fact remains that we and the Thai are also breaking—not bending—the Accords: bombing and tactical air support of RLG troops from Thai and SVN bases; equipment, training, and logistic support of RLG and Thai ground and air forces; CIA advising and leading of irregular forces. These actions are at Souvanna's request or concurrence, which lend them some legitimacy. There are other actions, such as Panhandle cross-border raids, that we have conducted without his permission—some with his cognizance, others without. We can, and should, make the best case possible about Hanoi's culpability. We certainly can set forth a much more persuasive record than the Vietnam one. But let us recognize the handicaps of our own violations, no matter how justifiable, and the pervasive skepticism of world and American opinion that this Administration has inherited from the previous Administration's credibility gap. We can expect such handicaps to muddy the record and lower our score of theological and propaganda points.

9. *How can we be candid about our Laotian activities?*

There is a growing and correct consensus that we have little choice but to be more candid about our role in Laos. Congress and the newspapers will defoliate our cover. We can either sit back and let the facts be yanked from us slowly, reluctantly, bitterly and thus create this Administration's own credibility gap. Or we can take the initiative: underline our limited objectives; cite Hanoi's violations; stress that our supporting actions respond to these violations and the RLG's requests; blame the Laos situation on the Kennedy–Johnson administrations; and explain that we have been clandestine both because Hanoi has refused to acknowledge its systematic violations of the Geneva Accords and because keeping the war undeclared seemed to offer a better chance to deescalate and stabilize than a polemical, face-involving slugging match with the other side. Above all we should paint North Vietnam (with its 50,000 troops) as the Goliath and the RLG as the David in Laos, the reverse of our side's image in Vietnam. The greater our involvement in Laos, however, the more difficult it is to project the desired image. To make our best case will require declassification of much sensitive information (not unlike our SAFEGUARD campaign) and persuading Souvanna that such candor is necessary.

Assuming we do follow this course, *how do we protect Souvanna's position as legitimate head of government in line with the Geneva Accords?*

Will franker acknowledgment of his and our bending of the Accords tempt (or force) Moscow to withdraw recognition of his titular role and the NVN/PL to completely write him off as a legitimate factor in any future government? Souvanna is crucial both because he is probably the only leader who can hold the non-communist forces together and because he seems to be the only possible figure to head up a new Laos settlement based on revitalized 1962 Accords. Difficult as this latter objective appears, it becomes impossible if the communists withdraw their ambassadors from Vientiane, completely disavow Souvanna and set up their own revolutionary government. These are not arguments against candor about our activities but rather for a sensitivity to the need to preserve Souvanna's legitimacy and to avoid giving the other side a pretext to announce that we have, by our own admission, abrogated the Geneva Accords.

10. *Should the Guam doctrine apply to Laos and Thailand?*

The President has said that we should not be more concerned about Asian nations' security than they are themselves. The RLG and Thailand have of course registered their concern for the neutrality and independence of Laos. It is difficult to sense much anxiety about Laos among other Asian nations, whether they be Burma and Cambodia<sup>11</sup> (contiguous to Laos and signatories of the 1962 Accords); Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia (in the immediate vicinity of Laos); or Japan, Korea and the Philippines (allies of the U.S. and Thailand).<sup>12</sup> Should we not test their interests in the fate of Laos and have Souvanna ask them what they would be willing to do in terms of diplomatic efforts and military support? They would be asked to weigh their own courses of action, consult among themselves and then state what they were prepared to do to:

—exert diplomatic pressures upon Hanoi and Moscow, explaining their concerns over North Vietnamese actions in Laos and their desire to see the 1962 Accords honored.

—contribute economic or military assistance (not troops) to the RLG if the above diplomatic efforts do not bear fruit.

—define the precise role they wished the U.S. to play, short of sending in combat forces.

Depending on what the Asians were willing to do themselves we would then indicate our own role in line with the Guam approach. We would not demonstrate a greater concern or take proportionately

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<sup>11</sup> Kissinger underlined "Cambodia" and wrote in the margin: "How do you sense it?"

<sup>12</sup> Kissinger highlighted this sentence and wrote in the margin: "This is one of the slogans I'd like to see [them] examine themselves."



greater actions to preserve the independence of Laos than what the Asians—who should have a greater stake—would do themselves.

The same approach to Asian nations could be applied to support of Thailand. This course of action would implement the Guam doctrine with respect to these countries. It would have to be managed carefully to avoid the appearance of a Clifford/Taylor-type campaign for Asian support at one extreme and a transparent American bug-out from Southeast Asia at the other extreme. The question remains: *do we reserve the Guam doctrine for post-Laos and post-Thailand as well as post-Vietnam?*

### *Conclusion*

*The Laos papers provided by the bureaucracy are likely to lean as follows:*

—Satisfaction over the recent RLG military successes, however, temporary.

—Predictions that the enemy's counter-offensive will be more extensive than ever before.

—Suggested increases in U.S. military support of the RLG.

—Acknowledgment of the enemy's capability to overrun Laos, coupled with a refusal to face the policy questions this contingency would present us.

—Assumption that our bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail is non-negotiable.

—Belief that Hanoi's aggression and our relative innocence will be as clearcut to the world and the American public as in fact they really are.

—Inattention to what other Asian nations should be expected to do in support of Laos and Thailand.

*The questions posed above suggest a need to:*

—Have a clear policy rationale for our side's military tactics.

—Recognize that a continuing seasonal military cycle in Laos may be riskier than attempts to break that cycle.

—Judge enemy intentions and react to enemy moves on the basis of the past record as well as plausible hypotheses.

—Question marked increases in our military support in light of the other side's ability to overrun the country and our unwillingness to commit American troops.

—Weigh the importance of our Ho Chi Minh Trail bombing against the need to secure a Laotian buffer for Thailand.

—Recognize the problems as well as the necessity for public candor.

—Consider the applicability of the Guam doctrine to Laos and Thailand.

*These implications do not add up to a policy. They do suggest that the policies that are likely to be considered might be on the wrong track.<sup>13</sup>*

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<sup>13</sup> Kissinger highlighted these questions and wrote in the margin: "How do we get all this?"

### 131. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, October 6, 1969, 2:34–4:30 p.m.

#### SUBJECT

Laos

#### PARTICIPATION

Henry A. Kissinger, Chairman

State

U. Alexis Johnson

Defense

G. Warren Nutter

CIA

Thomas H. Karamessines

JCS

Vice Admiral Nels C. Johnson

NSC Staff

John H. Holdridge

Col. Robert M. Behr

#### *Summary of Decisions*

1. The proposal to resettle the Meo should be identified only as a “last ditch” measure.

2. A State/Defense message will be dispatched asking for in-country recommendations on the proper distribution of M-16 rifles between the RLA and Meo irregulars.<sup>2</sup> Recommendations will be elicited from Defense on the provision of additional rifles above the Presidential authorization of 20,000.

3. Additional T-28 aircraft should be made available to the RLF but not from Thai resources.

4. If Souvanna desires artillery support, consideration should be given to 105s as opposed to 155s.

5. A State/Defense message will be sent asking for in-country opinion on the possibility of earmarking and training specific Thai units for operations in Laos.<sup>3</sup>

6. The use of “mercenary” pilots should not be pursued.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

<sup>2</sup> Not found.

<sup>3</sup> Not found.

7. Final decisions on many recommended courses of action will have to be suspended until the conversations with Souvanna have been evaluated.

The meeting began at 2:34 P.M. Kissinger said he thought the Laos paper to be a first class analytical effort.<sup>4</sup> His problem is how to get from here to a decision point. Ever since August the President has been pressing for action to stabilize the Laotian problem. He recognizes that it is difficult to make an intrinsic case for Laos. Nevertheless, Laos borders on Thailand, whose security could be threatened by the loss of Laos to communist forces. Moreover, how can a political settlement in Vietnam be defended if we permit the DRV to erode or abrogate the Geneva Agreements on Laos?

Secretary Johnson stated that the paper under consideration does not address itself to the security of Thailand. With regard to Laos, his general feeling is one of optimism. Having observed the rhythmic pattern of events over a period of years (during which time the DRV could have almost at will scored telling military successes against the RLG), what now is different is that we are in the aftermath of unprecedented military achievements by the forces of Vang Pao. We must now anticipate an almost certain response by the DRV. We should not, however, over-react. Things move slowly in the area and we should do what we can—physically and psychologically—to beef-up the RLG.

Kissinger asked when the 12,000 NVN troops moving along Route 7 would get into place. Admiral Johnson replied that the first elements have reached the Plain of Jars, but the main body is still enroute.

The Group then speculated at some length about the tactics and motives of the NVN forces in recent months. One cannot be certain that NVN activity has not been a part of a pre-determined plan of operations in Laos. On the other hand, their current moves may be a reaction to the recent successes of Vang Pao. Whatever their motives, Vang Pao's destruction of large quantities of pre-stocked NVN matériel has caused modification of their tactic of moving up to supplies. Now the supplies must accompany the troops.

Secretary Johnson said the advance NVN elements are the only forces exerting military pressure now. Our worry should be what may happen, not what is happening. In the absence of a real crisis we should act deliberately along the lines we have been, that is, a policy of strengthening the RLG but without commitment of our forces. The real

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<sup>4</sup> Kissinger is apparently referring to a draft report prepared by the WSAG Working Group, which was summarized for the President on October 20; see Document 138. The October 10 plan is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 545, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. II, 1 August 1969 to 10 October 1969.

problem arises in the event the NVN are moving to take control of the Mekong River as a part of their operations against SVN. What moves could we make to deter this?

Kissinger suggested a forcible reaction now might be productive, but noted that Laos paper said quite the opposite—that a forcible U.S. move might precipitate a NVN advance against the Mekong.

Admiral Johnson reported the concern of Vang Pao that his people (the Meo) are suffering a great deal. Accordingly he is willing to “have another go” at the NVN to relieve the pressure. This failing, a mass withdrawal to the region of the Thai border is the only remaining solution. The Group then discussed the utility of resettlement of the Meo as a possible course of action, as suggested by the paper. The consensus was that, as an immediate measure, the proposal is off-track. A movement of such proportions would be, in effect, a retreat and would follow major military reverses, which are not now foreseen. It was agreed to drop this option.

Kissinger expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of detail in the maps used in the paper. Karamessines said he would correct this inadequacy.

Kissinger returned to the basic question of NVN strategy. Why would they withdraw over 40,000 troops and then re-introduce 12,000? Would the 12,000 represent a holding force until the main force can be re-supplied and moved back as a part of an expanded plan of operations against Laos? Or is it more likely that the 12,000 have been dispatched as a replacement force but with reduced objectives? The objective, in the case of the latter, might be a strategic penetration to separate Laos into large chunks, interdicting the RLG LOC between Vientiane and Luang Prabang.

Secretary Johnson stated there are two theories explaining the DRV strategic motivations and, in particular, their seeming reluctance to press their advantage. (1) They believe that if SVN falls, so will Laos. In other words, they can wait. (2) They have pushed up to what they think the traffic will bear without forcing the U.S. into more militant responses. Moreover, the Soviets have had an interest in maintaining a facade of legitimacy. As long as the communists are not losing territory and the 1962 lines are still more or less recognized political boundaries, there is no compelling need to completely de-stabilize the situation. As a consequence, Secretary Johnson opined, the DRV may make definite and major moves to restore their losses in the Plain of Jars, but little more than that. We shouldn't do anything indicative of overreaction until it is apparent that the intentions of the DRV go beyond restoration of their losses.

Kissinger asked how we could convey to the other side the impression that we are willing to acquiesce in their traditional moves, but

will react positively to anything beyond that. He responded to his own question by saying we could introduce 6,000 U.S. troops and tell Senator Fulbright it is only a "token force."

Karamessines asked Secretary Johnson if he would advocate continued support of the RLG, to which Johnson replied emphatically and affirmatively, saying that most of the measures advocated by the Laos paper make good sense.

Admiral Johnson then turned to the specifics of the recommended measures of assistance. He noted that of the 20,000 M-16 rifles approved by the President for Laotian forces, the number had grown in the paper to 34,500. The JCS can handle the 20,000 with no problem and would probably favor an increase, but the central point is to get a fix on the right number. *All* agreed that this should be done.

Karamessines pointed out that the 20,000 rifles appeared destined for the RLA, with other numbers being considered for the Meo irregulars (who know how to use them). After considerable discussion the Group agreed that a significant number of the 20,000 should go to the Meo (perhaps as high as 6000), this being within the spirit of the President's instructions. The local commanders should make the determination of the most effective break-out and will be requested to do so by a joint State/Defense message.

No conclusive answer was given to Admiral Johnson's question as to the desirability of exceeding the specific number of 20,000 rifles.

Secretary Johnson brought up the matter of T-28 aircraft for the RLAF and the Thais, stating that the provision of additional aircraft is a high priority action. Kissinger was strong on the point that T-28s should not be taken from the Thais to be given to the RLAF. Admiral Johnson agreed, reporting that the JCS will probably recommend getting the aircraft (the number now looks like 22) from the VNAF and giving them to the RLAF. The VNAF shortage could then be made up from other types in the U.S. inventory. The whole operation, once approved, would take about 45 days.

While on the subject of air support, Admiral Johnson noted the shortage of aerial reconnaissance direction finding capability in Laos. The only quick-fix is to divert resources from SVN, which is not a good solution. No answer to this problem is in hand, but it is being studied.

A lengthy discussion ensued on the subject of artillery support for the Laotians. The paper recommends introducing a Thai artillery unit equipped with 155s. Thanom had advocated this development although Souvanna has not asked for it. At the present time Thai volunteers are training the Meo in the use of 155s. This gun is not particularly suitable for operations in Laos. Moving them about from mountain to mountain by helicopter is an awkward task. Nevertheless, field recommendations favor introduction of Thai 155s with a combat

defense force of about 300 troops. CINCPAC recommends a return of the Sierra Romeo 8 package to train the Meo, and then move it back out of country. The consensus of the Group was that the value of 155s is more symbolic than practical, that 105s would be eminently more suitable both in terms of their versatility and relative ease of logistic support, and that a decision to supply any artillery should depend on what Souvanna says he wants during his current visit here. In the meanwhile Admiral Johnson will ask the Joint Staff to prepare an evaluation of the advantages of 105s over 155s.

Kissinger reported the inclination of the President to support Souvanna should he request B-52 operations against NVN/PL forces. That raises the question of what, precisely, does Souvanna want—is he elated or depressed? Will he ask for money, B-52s or ground forces?

Secretary Johnson said he would have Marshall Green report his conversation with Souvanna ASAP,<sup>5</sup> and Kissinger said he would try to get an early read-out of the conversation between the President and the prince.<sup>6</sup>

Kissinger then asked if the Group was prepared to endorse all of the measures they had discussed, or had not previously excluded. Secretary Johnson said yes, with the exception of Thai artillery, which would depend on Souvanna. Moreover, he said, the Group need not concern itself with Laotian political actions since all of the things the paper recommends Souvanna do, he is already doing on his initiative.

Secretary Johnson wondered about the paper recommendation for increased Thai training and support of RLG forces. What specifically did the drafter have in mind? No one knew, but the paper will be amended to state in factual terms what is recommended.

Secretary Johnson addressed himself to the recommendation that Thai forces be trained for possible operations in Laos. This puzzled him. Are we not already training the Thai forces for such operations.

Admiral Johnson explained the situation. The only really effective training to date has been associated with special Thai units earmarked for SVN. We could do the same for Laos. General training for the bulk of the Thai forces presents problems because it requires field maneuvers,

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<sup>5</sup> Green met Souvanna at the airport on October 6 and a memorandum of conversation of their discussion during the ride to Washington is *ibid.*, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 7 LAOS. Kissinger sent Nixon a copy of this memorandum of conversation and a copy of a conversation on October 4 between Souvanna and Lao Country Officer, Mark S. Pratt, in New York City. After briefly summarizing Souvanna's main points, Kissinger noted that the only topic Souvanna specifically stated he planned to raise with Nixon was the timely supply of military equipment to Laos. (Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, October 7, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL-287, Memoranda to the President, 1969 Oct., Folder 1)

<sup>6</sup> See Documents 132 and 133.

which in turn calls for increased rations and payment of per diem. Should we desire to go that route, the U.S. would have to pick up the tab.

Secretary Johnson demurred, saying that the Thais could and should pay for their own training. He recommended that State and Defense draft a joint message asking the in-country team what can be done along these lines.

Secretary Johnson then mentioned the paper's recommendation to use third country pilots to fly Laotian aircraft. The general opinion on this recommendation was that it introduced too many complications and should be dropped.

Kissinger asked for a discussion of B-52 reconnaissance operations over Laos, which has long been on the President's mind. Secretary Johnson said that if the President wished, it would be done. He, however, would not do it now. Kissinger asked the Group to reason it out. If we are not now under serious pressure would we be trumping an ace? If a NVN offensive starts, would we then use the measure as a signal? All agreed that we would. Kissinger then asked what the DRV would conclude if we did it now. Admiral Johnson doubted that the impact would be great. We've done it before with one or two aircraft and there was no reaction. That operation produced good results but he would have to check on the extent of the radar scope photography that was obtained. He cautioned the Group to remember that B-52 recon sorties had to be escorted to protect the bombers from MIGs. He stated further that obtaining data on actual target locations is more important than getting data to assist navigation. That information is hard to get from the air, particularly if troop concentrations are what is sought. Kissinger wondered when would be the best time to play the card—now or later. Secretary Johnson and Nutter recommended withholding until after a definite NVN move. Kissinger remarked that a better basis for decision will be available after the conversations with Souvanna have been analyzed. Then we will be in a better position to decide when the signal should be given, for what purpose, and with what effect. He asked Admiral Johnson to find out the size of the B-52 force the JCS were thinking about. Admiral Johnson agreed to do so and then raised a question about the paper's recommendation regarding increased reconnaissance over NVN. He wondered why this action is being called for because to his knowledge the program is currently meeting its objectives. Secretary Johnson remarked that we should do whatever is needed to acquire intelligence, plus whatever "signalling" is called for.

Kissinger inquired about the recommendation to increase psychological operations in Laos. Admiral Johnson said that leaflet drops had been restrained to date by the imposition of restraints by the RLG. All

agreed that no further action would be taken in this area until the wishes of Souvanna are made known.

Kissinger concluded the meeting by asking that Secretary Johnson take action to reorganize the paper, focusing on recommendations as to what needs to be done and what decisions need to be made. The recommended actions should be broken down into those that will go on normally and those that will be dependent on a NVN/PL offensive of increased scale. He asked that the revised paper be made available for another WSAG meeting before October 11th. This meeting adjourned at 4:30 P.M.

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### 132. Memorandum of Conversation<sup>1</sup>

Washington, October 7, 1969, 10:51 a.m.–12:04 p.m.

#### SUBJECT

Situation in Laos

#### PARTICIPANTS

The President

Prince Souvanna Phouma, Prime Minister of Laos

Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

Mrs. Sophia Porson, Interpreter

Asked by the President to give his views on the outlook in Laos, the Prime Minister said he expected a major offensive by the North Vietnamese, (1) because they always have an offensive at this time of year at the beginning of the dry season and (2) to reaffirm their adherence to the policy of Ho Chi Minh after his death. He was certain that the 312th Division now moving into Laos would attack the Plain

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 63, Memoranda of Conversations, Presidential File, 1969. Top Secret; Nodis. Copies were sent to Rogers, Laird, and Helms. The President, Souvanna Phouma, and an interpreter met in the Oval Office from 10:51 a.m. to 12:04 p.m. Kissinger joined them at 11:25 a.m. (President's Daily Diary, October 7; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files) On October 2 Acting Secretary of State Richardson sent Nixon a memorandum on the Souvanna visit and enclosed talking points. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 7 LAOS) On October 6 Richardson sent Kissinger additional talking points for the President. (Ibid.) Souvanna met with Rogers, Green, and Corcoran at noon on October 7 in Rogers' office. A memorandum of conversation of that meeting is *ibid.* On October 6, from 4 to 4:45 p.m., Souvanna met with Vice President Spiro Agnew; the memorandum of conversation of that meeting is also *ibid.*



of Jars. General Giap had told the Prime Minister in Hanoi in April 1964 that the North Vietnamese could not tolerate the presence of any troops other than Pathet Lao in the Plain. Therefore, this offensive will be designed to retake the Plain of Jars. The Prime Minister hoped that with US support the RLG could contain the offensive. He stated that the RLG does not need troops apart from its own; it only needs weapons, and air support. He had discussed obtaining weapons with Ambassador Godley before coming here—they need tanks, armored cars, and small planes, especially T-28s.

The Prime Minister then said he had sought to make it clear in public statements that there were no US troops in Laos despite what the *New York Times* has reported. He tried to correct the misinformation given by the *Times* when in Tokyo recently.

He explained that Laos asked for US military assistance starting in 1964 and it was only natural that US Government representatives supervise such assistance. It was the presence of the military personnel supervising military aid to Laos that had given rise to reports that US troops were in Laos.

The Prime Minister added that US aid to Laos is consistent with the Geneva Agreements. The US has not violated the agreements because there is an article that provides that Laos may import conventional weapons for its own defense. Laos has been attacked by the North Vietnamese and is merely defending itself. These weapons were requested not to wage war against its neighbors but to ward off enemy attack.

Moreover, the Prime Minister stated, it is the duty of all signatories of the Geneva Agreements to ensure and guarantee the respect of Laos' independence and neutrality. This commitment was undertaken by all in Geneva in 1962.

The President asked for the Prime Minister's view of recommendations by some that the Prime Minister should try to enlist Soviet help to obtain adherence to the Geneva Agreements. He was not recommending it himself, but wondered whether the Prime Minister was sympathetic to such recommendations or felt that the USSR's hands were tied owing to its obligations to North Vietnam.

The Prime Minister replied that he had repeatedly asked the USSR to intervene to ensure respect of Laos' neutrality. Unfortunately, Moscow has always answered that it was necessary to wait until the Vietnam problem had been solved before considering a solution to the Laotian problem. However, as the Lao see it, the Laotian problem was settled by the 1962 Geneva Agreements and they think it unfair that Laos be forced to bear the consequences of the Vietnam war. Additionally, there has been flagrant violation of the Geneva Agreements by North Vietnam. In that connection, the Prime Minister had written

to the Co-Chairmen calling for implementation of Article 4 of the Protocol to the Geneva Agreements. He was certain that a number of the signatories would endorse the need for application of that article. (He then read the text of Article 4 to the President.)<sup>2</sup>

The President remarked that there was no doubt about the legal commitment, but the tragedy was that except for the US no one is paying attention to it, viz. Peking, the USSR, North Vietnam.

The Prime Minister said the French Government had undertaken several *démarches* in Moscow at his request, but always got the same reply (wait till the Vietnam problem is resolved).

However, the Prime Minister continued, if the US, as the principal party concerned, were to take the initiative and contact other signatories (he cited France, UK, Canada, Cambodia, South Vietnam, Burma, India, Thailand) a majority could be mustered to present a resolution to the Co-Chairmen which would put pressure on the North Vietnamese.

The President asked the Prime Minister whether he thought we should take this initiative directly. The Prime Minister said yes, because the US is the primary country concerned and because the US is being accused of violating the Geneva Agreements.

The President then asked what the Prime Minister's view of the long-range situation in Laos was. Did he think that the North Vietnamese would inevitably overrun Laos or go back and forth?

The Prime Minister thought that the intention of North Vietnam was to take over Laos through the Pathet Lao. As he saw it, the 5-pointed star chosen by Ho Chi Minh as his emblem was significant. The five points stood for Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchina, Cambodia, and Laos, i.e., the five countries in the old Indochinese Federation. North Vietnam cannot survive on its own, as it is overpopulated. Prior to 1945, Tonkin depended on Cochinchinese rice to feed itself. Annam was of little interest because that was just a small strip of arid land between the sea and the mountains. Therefore, North Vietnam has always looked to the Mekong Valley for the fertile lands it needs to feed itself. This was not a new phenomenon dating from Ho Chi Minh, but had obtained under the French. In fact, when Indochina was under French domination, in the office of the Governor General in Hanoi there was a special bureau for the colonization of Laos by Vietnamese. Hence, in 1945, there were 200,000 North Vietnamese in Laos. Some took refuge in Thailand with certain Lao, others returned to North Vietnam.

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<sup>2</sup> Article 4 of the Protocol to the Declaration of Neutrality of Laos, July 23, 1962, reads: "The introduction of foreign regular and irregular troops, foreign para-military formations and foreign military personnel into Laos is prohibited." (*American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1962*, p. 1079)

At present, there are between 40,000 and 50,000 North Vietnamese in Thailand. They are the ones that are creating problems for the Thai Government. These are people who opted to return to North Vietnam but whom Ho Chi Minh refused to take back owing to the presence of the 7th Fleet in the Gulf of Tonkin.

President Nixon then asked the Prime Minister for his views and advice about our policy in connection with the Vietnam war—commenting that we received lots of advice, including from the *New York Times* which the Prime Minister had mentioned earlier. He wondered whether the Prime Minister thought we were pursuing the right course, whether we ought to do more or less militarily or diplomatically.

The Prime Minister said it was hard for him to define his thinking because he did not have enough information about the domestic situation in South Vietnam. However, in view of US public opinion, he thought the war must be ended quickly, by diplomatic and military means. The diplomatic measures were difficult owing to the Saigon Government's refusal to form a government of national union which the other side demands. It would be difficult to act unless the Government of President Thieu feels sufficiently strong to agree to a coalition government.

The President said that they would not do that, and remarked that a coalition government might pose problems, as it did in the case of Laos.

The Prime Minister disagreed, saying that the Laotian situation was somewhat different from the South Vietnamese. In the case of Laos, it was because there was a war between the North and the South that Hanoi took its Pathet Lao ministers out of Vientiane; Hanoi feared that the government might succeed in taking control of all the territory of Laos, thus preventing North Vietnam from sending troops south.

The Prime Minister stated that his government was not afraid of the Pathet Lao. He was certain that once peace was restored and the domestic situation was settled general elections would be held and that his government would win. To support his contention, he said that his government controls 700,000 refugees from the other zone. If you subtract them from the total population of 3,000,000, the number of Pathet Lao supporters was infinitesimal. He was certain that he would win in a general election, and reiterated that he had no fears from the political standpoint. If North Vietnam were not helping the Pathet Lao, there would be no Laotian problem. That problem is created by Hanoi. Hence, the situation in Laos was not the same as in South Vietnam.

The President said that it was a pleasure for him to see the Prime Minister again. He recalled having met him when he was Vice President, once at Blair House and once in Vientiane in 1953.

He said he had very pleasant memories of that visit. He added that we are vitally interested in seeing that the government and people of Laos remain independent and be able to choose their own way.

We want to help not only because of our obligations under the Geneva Agreements but because of our interests in Laos' future.

The Prime Minister thanked the President heartily for the US Government's support, past, present, and future. His country had been dominated by others in the past and was smaller than it ever had been, in fact there were more Lao outside Laos than inside. What little they had left they wanted to preserve. He had always been aware that only a policy of neutrality could protect Laos. Unfortunately, Laos' geographic position placed it between Communist countries and SEATO countries. Therefore, the Prime Minister had sought this neutrality for 10 years. He was happy it had been achieved at last and hoped that with the help of friendly nations it could be made a reality so that Laos could develop its economy (which it needed to do) and its culture, which had been sorely disrupted by the years of war.

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### 133. Memorandum of Conversation<sup>1</sup>

Washington, October 7, 1969, 10:51 a.m.–12:04 p.m.

#### SUBJECT

The Public Position on US Activities in Laos

#### PARTICIPANTS

The President  
 Prince Souvanna Phouma, Prime Minister of Laos  
 Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
 Mrs. Sophia Porson, Interpreter

(See separate Memcon for other subjects.)<sup>2</sup>

President Nixon asked what answer we should give when asked about the use of US air power in Laos, i.e., the air strikes conducted in Laos against the North Vietnamese at the RLG's request.

The Prime Minister suggested that the reply be that this is being done at the request of the RLG and is part of the commitment undertaken at Geneva to ensure Laos' territorial integrity, independence and neutrality.

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<sup>1</sup> Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 63, Memoranda of Conversation, Presidential File, 1969. Top Secret; Nodis. Copies were sent to Rogers, Laird, and Helms. See footnote 1, Document 132 regarding Souvanna's visit.

<sup>2</sup> Document 132.

The President said that so far we have refused comment. Did the Prime Minister think we should change our position and admit we have been conducting air strikes.

The Prime Minister thought it best to stick to the original position we took, i.e., simply state that we are conducting armed reconnaissance flights and that our planes respond when attacked. The infiltration by the North Vietnamese continues and the armed reconnaissance flights increase as the infiltration increases.

The President pointed out that the difficulty with that was that the Symington Subcommittee and others are aware of our attacks and will press for an answer.

The Prime Minister said he would say what he told the North Vietnamese Ambassador to Laos: If the North Vietnamese withdraw their troops, the RLG will ask for the bombing to stop. Also only North Vietnamese troops are bombed. The bombing is the RLG's only means of defense as it has fewer troops than the other side and no reserves to send in against the fresh troops coming in.

President Nixon said he completely approved the bombing and would do more but the problem is a domestic political one, i.e., whether the US will become as deeply involved in Laos as in Viet-Nam. Part of the answer lies in the Prime Minister's statement that there are no US ground troops in Laos and that none have been or will be requested. But this is a very delicate political issue and we have been trying to dance around it as much as possible.

The Prime Minister said he would go farther and state that Laos has always resisted the idea of an extension of the war to Laos. He vigorously opposed the famous McNamara Line. They do not want the war to be extended to Laos, and it is important that US public opinion understand that.

In short, the Prime Minister concluded, there was no violation of the Geneva Agreements, and no possibility of extending the conflict into Laos.

The President said he wanted to be sure that he understood the Prime Minister's position regarding US assistance. He summarized the Prime Minister's statement as follows:

- (1) He has stated publicly, as we have, that the US is providing logistical assistance and arms, but that the RLG does not want and does not need US ground forces;
- (2) His public position on the air support has been the same as ours; these are armed reconnaissance flights which react when attacked.

The President explained that he wanted to review this with the Prime Minister because the Symington Sub-Committee and others were aware of the truth, which is that we are providing air support to the RLG against the North Vietnamese. On that point, he asked the Prime

Minister what he thought we should say if pressed. Did the Prime Minister think we should and could admit publicly that air support is being given. He asked the question because the Prime Minister had indicated he thought the air support was consistent with the Geneva Agreements. This was a very important matter.

The Prime Minister thought we could say that this support was given at the request of the RLG when necessary, when the government forces were “submerged” or attacked by the enemy forces. It is not systematic bombing but intermittent bombing conducted in case of need. He stressed the need to indicate that it was not systematic, but only in the case of North Vietnamese attack.

The President returned to the point about whether or not this was a violation of the Geneva Agreements, saying that some people at the State Department had sent him a report stating that the bombing was in clear violation of the Geneva Agreements. The President reiterated that he supported the bombing himself, and would do more, but that he wanted to see how to resolve the problem of criticism of the bombing.

The Prime Minister remarked that the Agreements had been violated by the North Vietnamese before the ink had dried on them. The US intervention started in 1964, at the RLG’s request. Since everyone knows that the US is carrying out air strikes in Laos, the Prime Minister said, one could answer criticism by saying that this is in response to violations committed by the North Vietnamese and that we are acting at the RLG’s request. Additionally, one could say that it is the role of the signatories of the Geneva Agreements to defend the territorial integrity, independence, and neutrality of Laos. The US intervention came after the interference in Laotian affairs by the North Vietnamese. If there is a violation by the US, it is at the request of the RLG which is acting only in self-defense. It seemed to the Prime Minister that the responsibility of the US was involved here, and that the US was entitled to help Laos.

President Nixon indicated to Dr. Kissinger that he thought we must develop a more believable position, especially since the Prime Minister would be confronted with some tough questioning. He thought it would be a good idea to work out the position privately, adding the comment that the position he had taken could not be sustained in the long term under sophisticated probing.

Dr. Kissinger said the position would be discussed at a meeting of representatives of the agencies involved this afternoon,<sup>3</sup> and told the Prime Minister that he would check the position with him later.

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<sup>3</sup> No record of this meeting has been found.

Dr. Kissinger also remarked that the fact that the attacks are only against the North Vietnamese would help us out of the difficulty we are in since the North Vietnamese have never admitted the presence of North Vietnamese troops. This shows that they violated the Agreements first.

The President summed up by saying that he thought three points need to be emphasized in the position:

- (1) The RLG is entitled to the support of the US and others pursuant to the 1962 Geneva Agreements;
- (2) What the US has done and is doing is entirely consistent with the Geneva Agreements and always at the request of the RLG;
- (3) There has never been and never will be in any form a request by the RLG for US ground forces. The RLG wants to fight its own battles, and wants only logistic support. Additionally, from time to time, as necessary, and not systematically, when outside forces threaten to overrun Laos the US assists with air support. This support is given only on those occasions and only against the North Vietnamese forces who have been acting in violation of the Geneva Agreements.

The Prime Minister agreed with that statement.

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#### 134. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, undated.

##### SUBJECT

JCS Concept for Air and Naval Operations Against North Vietnam

On Saturday morning, you will be meeting with Secretary Laird and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to discuss the JCS concept plan for air and naval operations against North Vietnam.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 245, Agency Files, JCS, Vol. 1, 1969–1971. Top Secret; Sensitive. On October 10 Lynn sent Kissinger a memorandum critiquing the JCS plan and Laird's assessment of it. (Ibid.) Lynn also drafted this memorandum for the President and recommended that Kissinger sign it. Kissinger also sent Nixon a memorandum on October 10 attached to which were talking points for his meeting with Laird and the JCS. (Ibid.)

<sup>2</sup> October 11, see Document 136.

*Description of the JCS Plan*

The JCS have developed “a concept plan for high intensity air and naval operations against North Vietnam [which]<sup>3</sup> emphasizes the use of surprise and concentration of effort to achieve *maximum practicable psychological and military impact*.” (See Tab A.)<sup>4</sup>

The plan is divided into two phases:

—During Phase I, U.S. attack forces will

—“neutralize the North Vietnamese air force,”

—“close the ports through which North Vietnam receives the bulk of its war supporting materials,”

—“destroy various high value economic and war supporting facilities in North Vietnam, including interdiction efforts against the northeast rail line.”

Phase I will require five days of full operations. Because of the probability of bad weather and curtailed operations during any five day period in November, the JCS estimate that Phase I would require 9–21 calendar days to complete.

—Phase II is designed “to have an additional impact on Hanoi’s will and ability to carry on the war” through

—destruction of war supporting facilities, e.g. supplies, vehicles, coastal craft and port facilities,

—interdiction of the northeast railroad line from China.

In summary, the JCS state that “the combination of Phase I and Phase II operations will achieve meaningful military as well as psychological impact by

—reducing the availability of imported materials into North Vietnam, and

—exacting attrition of North Vietnam’s war-making capacity and its ability to support aggression in South Vietnam.”

The JCS recommend that their concept plan “be approved for continuing planning.”

*Discussion of the Plan*

The JCS concept and implementing plan have several serious shortcomings:

—They fail to reflect the strategic criteria essential to the success of such an effort, i.e.

<sup>3</sup> Brackets in the source text.

<sup>4</sup> Tab A, attached but not printed, is JCSM-600-69, October 1, revised October 7, and sent to Laird.



—that the *priority targets* should be strategic in nature, the destruction of which will achieve *sudden and significant disruption of the economy*;

—that restoration of the targets should be costly and time-consuming, so that their *destruction achieves a lasting military and economic effect* and continuous follow up bombing is unnecessary;

—that the operation should involve a series of *short, sharp military blows of increasing severity*, holding out to Hanoi the prospect of a long and increasingly disabling siege if they fail to come to an agreement.

They are not responsive to political requirements.

—The JCS propose to strike a large number of sensitive targets in Hanoi, such as the Ministry of Defense, the Hanoi Telephone and Telegraph Office, the airfield handling Hanoi's civilian air traffic, and the Air Force and Army Air Defense Command Headquarters.

—Striking such targets will maximize adverse domestic and foreign reactions to the operation: (a) Hanoi is where the press, the diplomatic corps and foreign business interests are concentrated. (b) There will be heavy civilian casualties. (c) Because Hanoi is the most heavily defended part of the country, we risk disproportionately heavy U.S. aircraft and crew losses in hitting these targets.

—By striking directly at the offices of Government officials, we may convey that our goal is the destruction of the country and the regime, thus inviting major outside intervention.

—The plan appears to call for only routine use of our attack resources (e.g., Thai based aircraft are assumed to fly only one sortie per day). Also by extending Phase I over five operational days, we increase the likelihood that the duration of the operation will have to be stretched out to well over a week and possibly two or three weeks because of bad weather, thus dissipating the advantages of a sharp, sudden, quick blow.

#### *Secretary of Defense Evaluation*

In transmitting this plan to you, Secretary Laird has provided a detailed critique (at Tab B)<sup>5</sup> which he believes “casts grave doubt on the validity and efficacy of the JCS concept plan.” He concludes, “. . . the plan would involve the U.S. in expanded costs and risks with no clear resultant military or political benefits.”

His critique, supported in part by CIA analysis, includes inter alia the following points:

—We would be unable to prevent North Vietnam from sustaining essential imports by bringing goods in overland and through the minefields.

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<sup>5</sup> Tab B, attached but not printed, is an October 8 memorandum from Laird to Nixon.

—We risk confrontations with Russia and Red China and critical reactions from Free World maritime states.

—Aircraft losses would exceed 100; “losses of major U.S. ships would have to be considered;” civilian casualties would be high.

—We might face pressures to seal off Cambodia, make B-52 raids over North Vietnam, and make ground incursions into Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam.

In my judgment, Secretary Laird’s critique is inadequate for three reasons:

—He does not address the fundamental issues associated with what we are trying to do.

—Since the purpose of the operation is not to stop supplies flowing into South Vietnam, Laird’s concerns about sealing off Cambodia and sending allied ground troops into the sanctuaries are not relevant; such actions are not part of the concept.

—The risk of a confrontation with Russia, which he cites as a disadvantage, may be essential if we are to get Russia’s help in ending the war.

—He doesn’t compare the risks he sees in the proposed plan with the risks of continuing on the present course.

—He makes a series of debating points of doubtful significance. In my judgment, they add up to an impression of treating the JCS proposal unfairly.

—Civilian casualties could be easily reduced by changing the targets.

—The use of lighters to circumvent the minefields, operation of North Vietnam’s aircraft from Red China, and relatively quick and painless reorientation of imports, for example, are of doubtful likelihood and significance.

### *The Issues*

This analysis suggests that we are up against a serious and potentially explosive problem:

—The JCS Concept Plan is in effect the first step toward what they hope will be a sustained and unrestricted bombing campaign. If we proceed in their way, the logic of events will probably impel us towards continuous, no-holds-barred attacks. If the plan fails, the alibi will be that the nation’s leaders failed to take all required military steps to make it succeed.

—Secretary Laird has used the JCS premises together with a smorgasbord of speculations, assertions and evidence to argue that nothing at all of this nature will work.

Neither the JCS nor Secretary Laird had addressed our problem, which is to develop and assess a military concept involving

—a mining operation sufficient to seal off the sea approaches to North Vietnam thereby *stopping her supply of waterborne imports*,

—collateral bombing designed to destroy or damage supplies, industrial capacity, and critical parts of the transportation system, thereby *intensifying the economic strains brought about by the mining*,

—all of this toward the objective of persuading the North Vietnamese that they face *the prospect of increasing economic and industrial deprivation if they do not come to a settlement*.

However, though the JCS plan is not responsive to this concept, it is not so egregious that it can be rejected out of hand.

*Recommendation:* I believe the meeting Saturday must be conducted with great care to avoid explosive confrontations. Talking points, which will set the context and are designed to elicit constructive responses from the participants, will be furnished separately.

During your Saturday discussions of the concept you should hear out all sides. However, I recommend against your making any decisions until a more satisfactory plan and assessment can be prepared.

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### 135. Notes of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>

Washington, October 10, 1969, 7:30 p.m.

K said he had just talked with Ben Reed. Reed said that Humphrey is taking a terrible time about his statement today.<sup>2</sup> Said it's as bad as during the campaign. P said "You mean they're getting after Humphrey?" And then the P asked if H was sorry. K said no, he was asked about it at a later press conference, and his answers shouldn't cause any trouble. P said "they made him trim?" K said yes. K said the response was bad from the press and the left wingers. P said, well, the H move is very important, very helpful to us. K asked the P if he had

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 365, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking.

<sup>2</sup> On October 10 former Vice President and Nixon Presidential opponent Hubert Humphrey met with Nixon and endorsed his plan to end the war. After the meeting Humphrey stated that Nixon was "proceeding along the right path" in Vietnam and "we have to give the President time to carry out his proposals, to carry out his plans and policies." Humphrey noted that "the worst thing that we can do is try to undermine the efforts of the President." (Stanley Millet, ed., *South Vietnam: U.S.-Communist Confrontation in Southeast Asia*, Vol. 4, 1969, pp. 160-161)

asked H to speak. President said no, he's a decent human being. Says he flops around, but he's a decent man. P said, of course, this drives the press right up the wall; the tide is good; the democratic leadership is not against us.

K said he had just seen some *Newsweek* people and had a feeling that they were a little bit shaken. Said he felt they thought the peace demonstration had gotten out of hand. P asked in what way. K pointed out that all the people getting into the scene were forcing, or trying to force, a government of confrontation. He said all of the American ideas aren't going to mean a damn if confrontation becomes our national style of politics. He said *Newsweek* is usually against us, and it's possible that these men were just baiting him, and warned the P not to expect the *Newsweek* piece to be friendly. The P said no, but we don't care, we've just got to try.

K said he is drafting a statement.<sup>3</sup> The P said he was seeing Lodge at 3:00 Monday and he thinks he should make a statement after seeing Lodge.<sup>4</sup> K said it should hit the papers Tuesday; confuse people. K said that *Newsweek* people said it was a very good day for us, Hershey and Humphrey. P said he hated to throw the old man out just as a sop to the students,<sup>5</sup> but that Humphrey, of course, was a good move.

The P said, by 72 the war is going to be over, and he is going to be the man who ended it. If we do it—put it right to the bastards—after all we're in there they're not. There's a lot of rough stuff coming up but the thing to do is to sail along. K said what the P must do is keep giving them a dignified manner. (P said oh of course.) K said no asking for sympathy. P said "God no." K says for him to point out that he was elected and because of this he has responsibility for the country.

P said it isn't just this issue, but the next one and the next one that comes up. What about Korea? What about Berlin? K said he is convinced that if we yield on this one we're just inviting the Soviets into a confrontation.

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<sup>3</sup> Not further identified.

<sup>4</sup> Nixon and Kissinger met with Lodge and Habib from 3:44 to 4:56 p.m. October 13. (President's Daily Diary; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files) No other record of this meeting has been found. A briefing memorandum from Kissinger to the President, October 11, in anticipation of the meeting is *ibid.*, NSC Files, Box 77, Vietnam Subject Files, Memos to Pres/HAK on Lodge.

<sup>5</sup> On October 10 Nixon accepted General Lewis B. Hershey's resignation as the Head of the Selective Service System and announced his intention to appoint him as an adviser to the President on manpower mobilization. (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1969*, p. 788)

P said it's like Acheson's statement about where is the line of demarcation.<sup>6</sup> K said yes, but it's different because here there is no line of demarcation if we yield. P said we won't yield. P said he doesn't want the enemy to think that we are affected by them [the protesters].<sup>7</sup> He had said he would not be affected by such things and he's not going to be. K said it is sure they were just feeling us out, that we must show that there will be no policy by confrontation.

P asked again about Humphrey; asked if Humphrey's man had said it was worse than before. P said those sons of bitches were playing a partisan line, that they were now out to destroy Humphrey. K said people were saying that the P is like Johnson; said they just want the P to be another Johnson. P said but Johnson was so inept with his hardness, that we are not going to fool around.

K said the November 3 speech<sup>8</sup> should be a factual listing of what the President has done. K said that was very impressive. P said he's not going to restate all that on television. He said we would put that out, but he'll be speaking to two audiences: home and abroad. He said for the home audience he simply wanted a simple, uncomplicated and very brief statement, not a long restatement of what he's done. K said, but make the public understand that you offered to send emissaries. The P said, and we received their emissaries. K said the P had made two overtures before the inauguration—that would be very impressive to the people. P said he would mention that for the first time he revealed what had before been diplomatically classified material; that he wanted the people to know. P said to K that he wanted him to get all the Rogers and Lodge contacts so that we could put that in. K pointed out that Lodge, Habib, and Rogers had had many meetings and he (K) had also—that that should be mentioned, and then the P should list all the things he did. K can list secret contacts.

P said in the Joint Chiefs meeting on Saturday [Oct. 11]<sup>9</sup> he was going to let Wheeler give a report; said he was going to force them to talk about Vietnam. He wants the discussion to be about that. K said Wheeler should give about 10 minutes on Vietnam, and the P said then he would ask them what to do about Vietnam. P said they would probably give him the standard answers about the 42-month plan, and he would say that was no good. K said they should believe that P is serious about the November 1 plan; if not, they won't give him any plan-

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<sup>6</sup> The so-called Acheson "Defense Perimeter Speech" made before the National Press Club in Washington on January 12, 1950; see *American Foreign Policy, Basic Documents, 1950–1955*, Vol. II, pp. 2310–2322.

<sup>7</sup> All brackets in the source text.

<sup>8</sup> See Document 144.

<sup>9</sup> See Document 136.

ning cooperation. Must be careful about telling them it's inadequate; they're terribly sensitive.

K said he thinks that really by November we ought to be in as good shape as possible. P said yes, it's got to be ready. P said whether the United States will be able to see this thing through at the present level is a question, but if they escalate, we have got to respond. K said if we can keep casualties down over the next four weeks it will be good. But if they go up dramatically, we have an excuse for what we are planning to do.

P said Laird put out the word—that he had changed the orders—thank God that he did. I told [*omission in the source text*] that I changed them when I talked to Abrams—I am not going to let Rogers get credit for what we thought up. We changed the orders. K said yes, the P did it on the plane to Saigon.

P said the best news all day is the Cambodian strike. He said he is convinced—he knows K disagrees with him on this—but he is convinced that this is more important than anything else. P said bombing in the North was [*omission in the source text*]. Here we are hitting them and hurting them and they don't get anything out of it. K said that they had found a new area, just north. Same rate of explosion, something like 70 secondaries. P said "suppose it blows in Cambodia." P said, we could just say we were just hitting areas on the border. K said we can stop it at any time. P said should we; K said I don't think we should. P said it indicates a certain toughness to them. K said we might stop it as we get closer to the first [of November]. P said why not stand down everything. K said you get into the same flap that you did last time. P: this time just stand down and don't say why. K said I think the best thing on the third is just to give a straight account. It's a damned impressive record.

### 136. Memorandum for the Record<sup>1</sup>

Washington, October 11, 1969, 9:45 a.m.–12:45 p.m.

SUBJECT

JCS Meeting with the President, Saturday, 11 October 1969 (U)

1. Present: President Nixon, SecDef, Mitchell, Kissinger, CJCS, CNO, CSA, CSAF, CMC.

2. The President began by stating that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss Vietnam and “evaluate what we could do if it became necessary to take more military action against North Vietnam.”

3. CJCS responded by first reporting his observations during his recent visit to South Vietnam.<sup>2</sup> He reported that Vietnamization was going well as was the Pacification Program. The number of enemy defectors is steadily increasing with a rising rate since Ho Chi Minh’s death. The Vietnamization Program is on or ahead of schedule which is: Army and Navy, June 1970—Air Force, June 1972. CJCS reported that *leadership* in the lower and middle ranks is a prime problem for the South Vietnamese. With respect to infiltration, CJCS reported that the total for 1968 was 245,000. This year, to date, the number is estimated at 110,000 plus at least 5,000 in the pipeline.

4. CJCS then described COSVN Resolution Number 9 and stated as the North Vietnamese objectives:

- a. Force rapid US withdrawal,
- b. Stop Vietnamization,
- c. Break up Pacification,
- d. Prepare for Coalition.

The rural areas were described as the prime objective with major efforts to be directed against Vietnamization. COSVN Number 8 called for victory. COSVN Number 9 called for a “high point” strategy. The North Vietnamese have shifted to the Delta which contains 34% of the people and produces two-thirds of the rice in South Vietnam. Resolution Number 9 urged that the Americans be forced to withdraw before Vietnamization succeeded. Forces were directed to reduce the tempo

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1008, Haig’s Special File, Haig’s Vietnam File—Vol. 2 (Apr–Oct 1969) [1 of 2]. Top Secret; Sensitive. Drafted on October 13 by Moorer. According to the President’s Daily Diary, Nixon met with Wheeler, Ryan, Chapman, Moorer, Laird, and Kissinger; Mitchell was not listed as a participant. The time of the meeting is also from the President’s Daily Diary. (Ibid., White House Central Files)

<sup>2</sup> Wheeler returned from an inspection trip to Vietnam on October 9.

because of losses and gear objectives to capabilities. In order to achieve maximum flexibility the North Vietnamese have increased the number of battalions but have reduced their manning level.

5. The North Vietnamese movement into the Delta may be an effort to establish Rach Gia in IV Corps as a capitol for a Provisional Government.

6. The President then inquired about the effectiveness of Menu (B52 strikes in Cambodia). CJCS described the methods of bomb assessment, and SecDef said the program had been effective.

7. The President then inquired about the use of aircraft in Laos, and asked, jokingly, if we should get permission from Symington. He stated he had talked to Souvanna about the use of B52s and Souvanna had said that he had preferred the Dakota. The President said with respect to the B52s that we must face the fact that little will cause the same criticism as a lot. He said we cannot let Laos be overrun because we have a treaty with Thailand. We must watch Souvanna's requests. He said we must look at the long term as well as the short term, and we could get involved in something worse than what we face at the moment.

8. SecDef said that his point with respect to the B52s was that there are no good targets. If we can find good targets, then we will take a look.

9. Mention was made of the fact that State is preparing a letter to the Control Commission.

10. The President then again stated that he did not want to borrow trouble, but we must watch Thailand. In addition, we must know what's going on and must watch the situation in Laos. He said that in evaluating the situation remember we must keep the Laotian situation where it is. We must keep a government in Vientiane and noted that the Ambassador is still trying to support the Harriman Agreement.

11. Doctor Kissinger then commented to the effect that the US cannot let the North Vietnamese get away with overrunning Laos, since Laos is tied directly to North Vietnam.

12. A discussion of the meaning of "lull" then followed. SecDef then said that SecState would probably get into this on "Meet the Press" the forthcoming Sunday.

13. The President noted that our casualties were also low last October and November. He stated that we should look at the lull in the political context and that the enemy was deliberately effecting the lull for political reasons. Doctor Kissinger stated that the North Vietnamese were trying to put us into a position where we cannot act. Mr. Mitchell stated that SecState should not take a soft line on "Meet the Press." The President stated that he must preserve hope but, at the same time, must



not let the enemy take credit for reducing the tempo of operations. The President asked what would we do if we have to go other than the long road. He said he was convinced that if we hold the line politically Vietnamization will work, provided we have time to do it deliberately. The President is quite aware of the fact that a large amount of American presence will be necessary for a long term. He feels that, despite the flak that we may take, the people will stand still for support, but will not stand still for a long drawn out ground action. The President stated that, in terms of decisions he will make, he will not be affected by the public or Congress. He stated he was in a different position than that held by President Johnson since he has a "purse problem." If the Congress cuts appropriations then we are finished.

14. The President then mentioned certain discussions he had had with Congressmen. Congressman Mahon said we could "catch hell" from the Hawks as well as the Doves if we followed the long road.

15. The President said that we have a very grave political problem. What he sees is that the student uprising will get more violent and that this will actually work against the students. He also commented that the polls are loaded as to the nature of the questions.

16. The President said that the real question is whether the US, after all this effort, should make a withdrawal and accept a coalition. It will be very detrimental to our long-range interests. He said we could:

- a. Get out now,
- b. Negotiate a settlement,
- c. Go the long road, which also carries with it a risk of failing.

He stated, "Now this is a problem, Mel. Do you think we can hold that long?" "Are we going to lose 10,000 men this year for nothing and then have a new Congress stop the appropriations?"

17. SecDef replied that the problem is interpretation in the US of what's going on. He stated that we should get a vote now from the Congress, and that he believes that 18 months from now no US forces will actually be engaged.

18. SecDef said that anything done in North Vietnam will take at least a year and that we should game plan progress for Vietnamization. SecDef is confident that it will work if we stick to it. He stated that Senators Russell and Stennis say we should figure "how to get the hell out."

19. The President stated that if the election results in Doves coming in we are in trouble, and what is really on the line is the maintenance of Congressional support. The President said that if we rule out escalation then we should remember the outcry that would follow another Tet. If that happens, the US must react. He said the same thing goes in Korea and that the next incident generated by the North Ko-

reans will result in a suitable retaliation. He then came back to the point that in Vietnam the real question is how long can we hold public opinion. The President said we could sustain current efforts for a year and take a look. If between now and next September we haven't made progress then we must act—we cannot sit still.

20. I told the President I would like to comment further on the lull. When the US ceased bombing North Vietnam, we played our last trump card and lost all leverage which might be used to force concessions on their part. The North Vietnamese are now fighting from the sanctuaries of North Vietnam and Cambodia and, hence, they can control the tempo of operations. (When we withdraw 10,000 miles the NVA withdraw less than a hundred miles.) In short, the NVN have the initiative and, as a result, are able to operate in the way calculated to best affect public opinion in the United States. I believe, therefore, that the lull is a political move and not a military one, and that the tempo of operations can be increased by the NVN at will.

21. The President said he would now like to hear from CJCS.

22. CJCS gave a brief of Pruning Knife,<sup>3</sup> the attack plan prepared by the Joint Staff. He stated he did not think it was a sound *military* plan—that there were problem areas. He first mentioned the weather, and stated it would take at least a week to get five days of operations. He pointed up the problem of the Air Force tankers and the necessity to move the aircraft carrier from the Korean area to the Tonkin Gulf. CJCS then stated that surprise during the first 36 hours will help. He noted other problem areas. The capabilities of the new North Vietnamese missiles, including the radar frequency changes. CJCS said that the Chiefs thought that the plan was militarily unsound because it was too short. (This was a political and not a military plan and was not intended to have full-scale military objectives.)

23. The President then asked, “What can we do in two weeks?” He went on to request that the plan be refined in terms of maximum shock impact, with limited civilian casualties. He stated that maximum shock effect should be measured in terms of capacity to wage war. He said we will be hitting to impair economy—POL, power, dikes, railroads, interdiction points, etc. Doctor Kissinger said we should use as target criteria high economic value targets and bottleneck areas and noted that it doesn't mean much to strike at supplies distributed on trails. The President repeated that we should refine the plan and noted that the objective was not to stop support of the war in the South. The President wants two plans of 7 and 14 days duration for both the wet and dry seasons with reduced follow on sorties to reseed minefields

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<sup>3</sup> Summarized in Document 134.

and hit Northeast railroad. He stated we should not be concerned about degrading SIOF.

24. The President said that here is what may happen. The North Vietnamese may waddle along until the campaign starts and then make a provocation. There is a chance it will go in April. CJCS said that during a discussion in July President Thieu said that the North Vietnamese would continue the “high point-low point” strategy and then attack in January to embarrass the President.

25. I stated that it must be recognized that in the Pruning Knife plan the target list and the allocation of sorties were illustrative only. We still had much refining to do and the target studies combined with inputs from the field would require changes. Some discussion followed concerning the interdiction of the Northeast rail lines and mining of Haiphong. It was suggested that we had previously tried to interdict the rail lines, bombing targets all the way up to the Chinese border, and had not succeeded in stopping the operation. This I felt gives a wrong impression of what we are trying to do with Pruning Knife. I told the President that the current plan presents a different situation than that encountered before. I said that the current input into Haiphong was about 165,000 tons a month which it has been for a long time. This constituted about 90% of North Vietnamese requirements while about 10% was being brought in by rail. The railroads throughout this war have been operating at about 10–15% capacity. Consequently, if we mine Haiphong and throw the entire load on the railroad then it presents an entirely different target system. Traffic on the railroad is increased 7–10 times its present rate. Therefore, breaks in the rail line will generate large numbers of lucrative targets. Furthermore, with such heavy traffic the railroad must run night and day and it becomes more difficult to repair. There is also the initial problem of rerouting the traffic and finding enough rolling stock to meet such a tremendous expansion of effort. I do not think we could compare the railroad as a target system without mining to what it would be with mining.

26. SecDef then asked me to explain the mining problem in Sihanoukville. I said that the mining of Sihanoukville was very simple and it would have an impact on the operations of the enemy in the IV Corps area since we feel now that practically all military supplies for these areas are coming from Cambodia. In reply to a question by the President I repeated that the mining of Sihanoukville would pose no problem and no military risk and that the port facilities in Sihanoukville were very, very limited relative to those in Haiphong. Consequently, except for military requirements in the southern part of Vietnam, Sihanoukville could in no way take over the import load from Haiphong. Furthermore, it is not feasible to carry supplies overland from Sihanoukville back into North Vietnam.

27. *The President told SecDef that we must keep the Air and Navy forces available.* The North Vietnamese may decide to talk now and fight later. CSA mentioned the possibility of a preemptive buy of Cambodian supplies. Doctor Kissinger said that we must look at the CIA operations in Cambodia. In reply to a request from the President for comment, Attorney General Mitchell said that his remarks would be related to the domestic side. He said the question is whether or not the American public will stand for Vietnamization or escalation. The President said that Prime Minister Wilson will give his support, and commented in general that support overseas for the US was increasing.

28. Doctor Kissinger stated that if North Vietnam's economy is crippled then this should accelerate Vietnamization (I agree).

29. CMC stated that if we attack the North Vietnamese then they will be compelled to react in South Vietnam with a large-scale attack since this is the reaction one could expect from Orientals.

30. Doctor Kissinger said that this all depends on whether or not they want to take the risk and, if they fight in the open, they will be finished. He said he was not prejudging but we should give them a very hard choice.

31. The President asked CSAF how long it would take to destroy the airfields in North Vietnam. The President appeared a little surprised when CSAF answered: "three weeks." Therefore, I hastened to add that CSAF was talking about total destruction of all runways, POL, facilities, etc. I said that the destruction of aircraft themselves could be done in a much shorter time, and that after the first attack I expected many of the aircraft to be evacuated into China as they had done before.

32. The President noted that next September we must elect those that will support our action, and then went on to say that he is prepared to take a public relations shock if the goal can be reached. The President then discussed with the SecDef the duration of budgetary support, and was told that we were okay for Fiscal '69 and that, due to the Continuation Resolution, we probably were okay until at least October of next year. Further discussion was held on the nature of polls and the need to explain our position.

33. The President said our line should be at this time: "We have a plan to bring the war to an end to get the Vietnamese in and the US out. The only ingredient missing is support of public opinion. The question is do we end the war achieving our objective, or let the Communists take over. If the Communists take over, this will encourage Communists and discourage our friends worldwide."

34. The SecDef said that the new plan is working and that we should continue along the present plan. He stated that a date on withdrawal should not be given since it, in effect, stops negotiations.

35. A discussion followed on the nature of speeches to be given to the public.

36. The President stated that there was one option he rules out—that is, that we are going to get out because of public opinion. This is attractive politically since the previous Administration could be blamed and those that do not support the present course would be happy. However, if there is a chance that Vietnamization will work we must take this chance. The President stated that if we fail we have had it. We cannot sit still without an option to do more. If the North Vietnamese try to break us with an offensive then we must hit them—and I do not mean tit for tat. He stated that he wants the military to think differently than the previous policy of tit for tat. (The JCS have always thought differently and have never agreed with the previous tit for tat policy.) The President stated that a great power must go on this basis of: “Don’t strike a king unless you intend to kill him.”

**T.H. Moorer<sup>4</sup>**

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<sup>4</sup> Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

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### **137. Memorandum of Conversation<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, October 17, 1969, 4:49–5:45 p.m.

#### **PARTICIPANTS**

The President  
Sir Robert Thompson  
Henry A. Kissinger  
John H. Holdridge, NSC Senior Staff Member

#### **SUBJECT**

The President’s Remarks to Sir Robert Thompson Concerning the Vietnam Situation

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 63, Memoranda of Conversations, Presidential File, 1969. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Holdridge sent this memorandum to Kissinger on October 24 with the recommendation that it receive no distribution outside the White House. Kissinger agreed. (Ibid.) The time of the meeting is from the President’s Daily Diary. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files)

After the opening pleasantries, in which the President complimented Sir Robert on his book,<sup>2</sup> the President outlined his thinking on the Vietnam situation and its relationship to the US domestic political scene. Going back over the last three years, he said, as well as during the campaign and again since his first NSC meeting, he had hit hard on the theme that there had been a waste of our military power against North Vietnam because this power had not been used in relation to our diplomatic policy. For example, the bombing should not have been stopped until an indication had been made to the opposite side that certain things should happen as a result. Although the North Vietnamese did not get something for nothing, there was no real quid pro quo from the bombing halt.

The President referred to the proposition that it was essential that we see the real character of the war, and added that we had not previously understood what this character was. He noted that the situation in Malaya which Sir Robert had dealt with was not quite similar, but nevertheless had many of the same characteristics—e.g. there was terrorism in response to which it was necessary to train police. The President went on to say that our direction had now changed, and there has been a subtle but significant shift in US policy toward Vietnam. Our position is now better and more in keeping with the type of war we are fighting. The President noted that the improved situation was becoming apparent, and referred to the recent appearance of optimistic reports from sources such as Joe Alsop, Crosby Noyes, and even such doves as the *New York Times*.

The President then presented his ideas as to where the Administration stands politically in the US. He noted that it would have been a popular move for him to say on the day that he came in, or even nine months later, that the Vietnam situation had been badly mismanaged by the previous Administration, and that while we had tried to handle it, it was such a mess that we felt we had to get out. The people would have been relieved. There is now a definite change as to whether we should have gone into Vietnam in the first place. Before, there was considerable agreement, but opinion is now running 60–40 against our involvement. Nevertheless, there is still a substantial proportion of the population which says that we should not take a bloody nose.

Continuing, the President expressed the strong conviction that regardless of why we were in Vietnam, the political consequences of a defeat were such that we had to see it through. He remarked that the enemy had misjudged him in one important way: they had caught him in the beginning of his term with three years more to run. His attitude

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<sup>2</sup> Sir Robert Thompson, *No Exit From Vietnam* (New York: D. McKay Co., 1969).

was not affected by shellfire. He had been through situations such as this before, and had learned that polls and editorials don't make policy. He had visited Vietnam in 1953, in 1956, and six times between 1961 and 1968. Based on his experience, he knew that if the US ended the war, and accepted the imposition of a coalition government, this would break the South Vietnamese Government.

Parenthetically, the President gave his evaluation of the Thieu government, mentioning that it was difficult even for objective observers to form judgments of new governments, but that it was remarkable what the Thieu government had accomplished despite its newness and the wartime pressures. Admittedly it needed to carry out political and administrative reforms, to let political prisoners out of jail, and to implement a land reform program. However, it had made great progress.

Returning to US objectives in Vietnam, the President again stressed his conviction that the US must see it through for the limited objectives for which we are there—to deny South Vietnam to those who would want to create the impression they had won it by force, as well as to leave a government established by the people through their own choice. Having this objective in mind, the President said, he hoped in the three years ahead of him to achieve a responsive Congress and a change in public opinion. He observed that unlike the political organization in the UK with which Sir Robert was familiar, Congress controlled the purse strings in the US and was thus extremely influential. Looking ahead, he therefore saw a very difficult situation unless a change was brought about by 1970 or 1971. If the American people fail to see an end in sight by this period, we would lose on the homefront what was being won in Vietnam. Sir Robert emphatically agreed.

The President asked Sir Robert if he ruled out the possibility of a negotiated settlement. Sir Robert said that the only circumstances under which he saw such a possibility were if it came through to Hanoi that we were staying and that conditions in the South were going well from the US standpoint. Hanoi might then want to save what was left. He did not, however, see these circumstances as existing now.

The President asked what Sir Robert thought of the "option to the right." By this, he explained, he meant escalation. Sir Robert answered that he would rule escalation out from the US standpoint. The Administration was running its greatest risk with American opinion and dissent, as well as with world opinion. If escalation worked, he asked, what would the Administration look like? The President remarked that this depended on what we did. Bombing was one thing, but a precise surgical operation was another. Looking at things from the standpoint of the Soviet Union, he felt that the USSR was not presently exercising its influence, but as in the case of the Korean war, might possibly do so if there were incentives on the "negative side".

Sir Robert mentioned that within the present timetable, looking not too far ahead, and assuming that present US policy is pursued, victory could be won in two years if the South Vietnamese people retain their confidence in the US. Alternatively, if they thought we were going to withdraw, then there would be a collapse. He doubted that enemy capabilities were such as to launch another Tet offensive but foresaw the possibility of several “bad fortnights” which would hurt.

Turning to judgments made by presumably competent observers and the way that these may differ from realities, Sir Robert mentioned a case in Malaya, when Victor Purcell, a man with a wealth of background in the country, had said in 1954 that nothing which Sir Gerald Templar was doing was right, and that the British couldn’t possibly succeed and should pull out; the very next year, though, the Communists had cracked and asked for negotiations. Dr. Kissinger asked Sir Robert how the British had handled the Communist overture at that time. It was his impression that talks had not taken place. Sir Robert recalled that the British had held firm on terms, and the Communists had in consequence reduced their arguments to the point where all they wanted was the legalization of the Communist party. Tunku Abdul Rahman had been very helpful at this stage in rejecting these terms.

The President raised the proposition of Sir Robert going to South Vietnam to look at conditions for a reasonable period of time and on the basis of his experience in Vietnam, reporting back his independent judgment of how things actually were going. He hoped that South Vietnam would remain firm in the light of US withdrawals and in the timetable which he had in mind. He needed, though, to know just what it was that we had to sell, and on how to beat the polls. If he knew these things and could speak with certainty, he could exercise a greater effect on US public opinion. The President suggested, and Sir Robert agreed, that Sir Robert should go to Singapore as part of his trip to see Lee Kuan Yew and get the feel of Lee’s impressions of Vietnam developments.

Reverting to the topic of the US role in Asia, the President asked if, leaving out all else, he, Sir Robert, was convinced that the US must see it through in Vietnam. Sir Robert agreed “absolutely”, and added that in his opinion the future of Western civilization was at stake. The President went on to discuss the need for an educational program to get this point across to the American people. President Johnson’s great failure, the President remarked, was that with the exception of Johnson’s San Antonio speech the basic issues had never quite come through. Johnson simply called on everybody to stand with the flag. What was at stake now, the President added, is not only the future peace of the Pacific and the chances for independence in the region, but the survival of the US as a world power with the will to use this



power. If South Vietnam were to go, after a matter of months countries such as Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia would have to adjust because they believe they must play the winner. In fact, the domino theory would apply. In addition, 500,000 people in Vietnam would be massacred.

Another issue at stake, the President observed, is whether on the other side the hawks or the doves would succeed in setting policy. If the hawks were to get leverage out of a success in Vietnam, they would be tempted to try again elsewhere. They would try to show that the US was not the wave of the future, and US allies and friends would lose confidence. Sir Robert concurred, but expressed the thought that the Communist hawks might try to win out on a slow, non-controversial basis, aiming their policy at eroding the US position rather than launching direct challenges.

The President mentioned that even among European neutralists, there were those who saw the issues clearly. The Belgian Foreign Minister and Prime Minister had told him that whatever we see in the press, not to end the war in Vietnam as a US defeat. Golda Meir had said that time really might not be on the Soviets' side and that while they might be a threat now or for five or ten years, they had long-term problems. Nevertheless, she had said that the Soviets rank with the US as a naval power and she took comfort from the fact that the US is present, as a counter to the Soviets. He had told her, the President noted, that we couldn't continue in this position—if we were defeated in Vietnam, the US people would never stand firm elsewhere. The problem is the confidence of the American people in themselves, and we must think in domestic terms.

There was a further discussion of Sir Robert's mission to Vietnam, in which it was decided that Sir Robert would operate, as on previous occasions as a consultant to RAND and take with him Desmond Palmer, who had been Sir Robert's chief of staff in Malaya. The President assured Sir Robert that everything would be open to him and that our Embassy people in Saigon would most certainly provide all help that was needed. He wanted a really good judgment, the President declared. A time-frame of a month was decided upon.

Once again, the President referred to the "option to the right". American public opinion has been closely polled, and it seemed probable that the people were not so much anti-war as tending to feel that the US should get in or get out. They did not like the idea of the greatest power in the world being made to back down by a little country, but favored withdrawing from the war unless we did something. Sir Robert commented that the "option to the right" didn't help in the South; that unless the gains made there were solidified so that the US could leave, the situation would still be shaky. In his opinion, the best

thing for the US to do was to show that it could beat the Communists in their own way. Dr. Kissinger referred to the Malayan situation in which the opposition had been identifiable and there had been no outside supply sources, to which the President observed we could consider the option of quarantining the North Vietnamese supplies. The Soviets could help in this, since they would not want a confrontation.

Sir Robert stated that the Soviets indeed would not want a confrontation and also don't want problems with the Chinese. He felt that they did not want the US out of Vietnam too quickly, as they were in no position to inherit US power and were afraid that without the US the area would fall into Chinese hands. Dr. Kissinger described the "option to the right" as being a problem of time. Given sufficient time, Sir Robert's method was best, but if we were being squeezed, a bold strike might help. With success in the South, and Soviet fear of a confrontation and fear of the Chinese, we could improve our position.

The President added that success in the South was important, and that if the reports we received were half true, a new factor had come about through a dramatic change for the better there. This is what he really wanted Sir Robert to look into.<sup>3</sup> The discussion turned to indicators of the improved situation in South Vietnam, such as the increased Chieu Hoi rate, which included North Vietnamese—something which had never occurred before—and which was taking place without military pressure. Enemy morale had also declined. In Sir Robert's opinion, the most significant news was that the refugees were going back to their villages in large numbers. In this respect, the President stated that he wanted the worst news as well as the best. The military were trying to hold down the withdrawal rate and haggling over numbers such as 28 or 30 thousand. It was possible that they were being overcautious in evaluating developments, since they had been burned so often, e.g., in the 1968 Tet offensive and the "mini-Tet" this year. On the other hand, perhaps we were overly optimistic on the pacification side, but the reports were indeed better. The whole area of government in the South had improved.

The President referred to President Thieu, saying that he was getting an undeservedly bad reputation. Although some people said that the Administration must pressure Thieu to take the Buddhists back into

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<sup>3</sup> In backchannel message WH 92789 to Saigon, October 18, Kissinger informed Bunker that Nixon had asked Thompson "to provide independent assessment of security situation and general political, economic, and military conditions" in South Vietnam. Kissinger counted on the Ambassador and the Mission Council to cooperate with Thompson and provide him all the facilities he needed. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 65, Vietnam Subject Files, 8-A, All Backchannel, Vol. II, 10/69)

the government, bring in Big Minh, crack down on corruption, broaden the base, and go forward with land reform, he, the President, didn't care what Thieu did as long as it helped the war. The conversation closed with a remark by Sir Robert that the US and the Vietnamese were fighting at different levels. The Vietnamese were, in fact, fighting for survival. When we had similarly fought for survival, we, like they, had used everything in the book.

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**138. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, October 20, 1969.

SUBJECT

Washington Special Action Group's Recommendations for Providing Military Assistance to Laos

The Washington Special Action Group has developed a plan for providing military assistance to the Lao Government forces.<sup>2</sup> This plan lists actions which are already under way, and also contains agreed recommendations on further actions for your approval. The actions already taken include providing the regular and irregular Lao Government forces with M-16s and more artillery, giving the Air Force additional T-28s, improving and maintaining US aerial reconnaissance capability and tactical air operations, increasing Thai training and support of the Lao forces, and supporting political moves by Prince Souvanna Phouma to improve his posture as a genuine neutralist.

Actions for which your approval is requested are:<sup>3</sup>

1. Working out with our Embassies in Vientiane and Bangkok the introduction of a small Thai fire-control element into Laos to assist Meo gun crews, phasing the Thai out when Meo have been adequately

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 64, Memoranda to the President, 1969 October. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for action. Drafted by Holdridge on October 16, and sent to Kissinger under a covering memorandum of the same date.

<sup>2</sup> See footnote 4, Document 131.

<sup>3</sup> Nixon initialed the approve option for all 5 recommendations. In an October 23 memorandum to Rogers, Laird, and Helms, Kissinger directed them to undertake these five actions. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 1, Chronological File, 1969 October–November)

trained to replace them. The assumption is that immediate reintroduction of the full Thai artillery battery which was withdrawn earlier (“Sierra Romeo VIII”) might reveal the Thai presence and leave Thailand vulnerable to charges of violating the 1962 Geneva Accords.

2. Continue studying with Embassies Vientiane and Bangkok the possible utilization of “Sierra Romeo VIII” elsewhere in Laos where it can be both effective and not readily visible or vulnerable. Defense believes that this battery is a useful asset; Ambassador Unger wants it to show the Thai that US interests continue in maintaining a military balance in Laos.

3. Consider via our Ambassadors in Bangkok and Vientiane giving specialized and intensive training to Thai forces for possible future operations against the North Vietnamese in Laos. Although the Thai forces would not necessarily be committed, their extra capabilities would be available in the event that their help becomes needed.

4. Once a North Vietnamese offensive begins and suitable targets are identified, implementing B-52 reconnaissance to develop strike information and possibly to give Hanoi a signal. This action would be withheld for the present, however, to give us an opportunity to study countermeasures for dealing with the risks involved and to provide for necessary advanced planning.

5. If an enemy offensive assumes a size indicating an intention of going beyond the previous pattern of attacks, giving commanders in the field authority to increase manned tactical reconnaissance activities over North Vietnam and the Lao border area below 19 degrees north and initiate tactical reconnaissance in the border area above 19 degrees north. Such activity would enhance intelligence collection capability, provide target data for possible future actions, serve as a signal to the DRV that we might bomb portions of North Vietnam, and possibly cause the DRV to disperse supplies and reconsider plans for an offensive.

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### 139. Editorial Note

On October 20, 1969, at 3:30 p.m., President Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger met in the Oval Office of the White House with Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin at the latter’s request to discuss the range of U.S.-Soviet relations. In an October 17 diary entry Assistant to the President Haldeman wrote: “K has all sorts of signal activity going on around the world to try to jar Soviets & NVN—appears to be working because Dobrynin asked for an early mtg—which we have set secretly for Monday [October 20].” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, Haldeman Files) In

an October 18 briefing paper to the President, Kissinger stressed: “Your basic purpose will be to keep the Soviets concerned about what we might do around November 1. You should also make clear that, whether or not they agree to SALT, unless there is real progress in Vietnam, US-Soviet relations will continue to be adversely affected.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin/HAK, 1969, [part 1]). According to the October 20 memorandum of conversation, the discussion on Vietnam follows:

“The President then turned to Vietnam. He said that prior to the bombing halt, ‘which you are aware will be one year old on November 1st,’ Ambassadors Bohlen, Thompson and Harriman had pointed out that the Soviet Union could do nothing as long as the United States was bombing a fellow Socialist country, and that it would be very active afterwards. The bombing halt was agreed to and the Soviet Union has done nothing.

“Of course, the President said, we now had an oblong table to the attainment of which the Soviet Union contributed something, but the U.S. did not consider that a great achievement. All conciliatory moves for the past year had been made by the United States. The President enumerated them.

“The President said he therefore had concluded that maybe the Soviet Union did not want to end the war in Vietnam. They may think that they can break the President; they may believe that the U.S. domestic situation is unmanageable; they may think that the war in Vietnam costs the Soviet Union only a small amount of money and costs the U.S. a great many lives. The President did not propose to argue with the Soviet assessment. As a great power, it had the right to take its position. On the other hand, the Ambassador had to understand the following: the Soviet Union would be stuck with the President for the next three years and three months, and the President would keep in mind what was being done right now. If the Soviet Union would not help us to get peace, the U.S. would have to pursue its own methods for bringing the war to an end. It could not allow a talk-fight strategy without taking action.

“The President said he hoped that the Ambassador would understand that such measures would not be directed against the Soviet Union, but would be in the U.S. interest of achieving peace. The U.S. recognized that a settlement must reflect the real situation. It recognized the right of all Vietnamese to participate in the political process. But up to now, there had been a complete refusal of North Vietnam to make its own proposals in order to have any serious discussion.

“The President pointed out that all the Ambassador had done was to repeat the same tired old slogans that the North Vietnamese had made already six months ago, and which he knew very well could lead nowhere. It was time to get discussions started. The humiliation of a defeat was absolutely unacceptable. The President recognized that the Soviet

leaders were tough and courageous, but so was he. He told Ambassador Dobrynin that he hoped that he would not mind this serious talk.

“President Nixon said he did not believe much in personal diplomacy, and he recognized that the Ambassador was a strong defender of the interests of his own country. The President pointed out that if the Soviet Union found it possible to do something in Vietnam, and the Vietnam war ended, the U.S. might do something dramatic to improve Soviet-U.S. relations, indeed something more dramatic than they could now imagine. But until then, real progress would be difficult.

“Ambassador Dobrynin asked whether this meant that there could be no progress. The President replied that progress was possible, but it would have to be confined essentially to what was attainable in diplomatic channels. He said that he was very happy to have Ambassador Dobrynin use the channel through Dr. Kissinger, and he would be prepared to talk to the Ambassador personally. He reiterated that the war could drag on, in which case the U.S. would find its own way to bring it to an end. There was no sense repeating the proposals of the last six months. However, he said, in the meantime, while the situation continued, we could all keep our tone down and talk correctly to each other. It would help, and would lay the basis for further progress, perhaps later on when conditions were more propitious.

“The President said that the whole world wanted us to get together. He too wanted nothing so much as to have his Administration remembered as a watershed in U.S.-Soviet relations, but we would not hold still for being ‘diddled’ to death in Vietnam.” (Memorandum of conversation, October 20; *ibid.*)

The full text of this discussion is in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XII, Soviet Union, 1969–October 1970. That evening the President called Kissinger and suggested that in a meeting with Dobrynin the next day on another subject, Kissinger should try to raise the issue of Vietnam. Nixon told Kissinger “to shake his head and say ‘I’m sorry, Mr. Ambassador, but he [Nixon] is out of control. Mr. Ambassador, as you know, I am very close to the President, but you don’t know this man—he has been through more than the rest of us put together.’ He’s made up his mind and unless there is some movement just shake your head and walk out. He is probably just figuring out what was said [at the October 20 meeting with Kissinger and Nixon].” Kissinger suggested typing up what the President said on a plain piece of paper and giving it to Dobrynin. The President agreed, noting that Dobrynin would ask, “What does this mean? Are you threatening me?” Then Nixon stated that Kissinger should say “Please now, Mr. Ambassador, the President isn’t threatening you. He just wants a little movement.” Kissinger suggested that “if they ignore what you said this afternoon, they either believe that your freedom of action is so circumscribed that you can’t do anything or Hanoi is out of control.” The President

suggested it was the latter and remarked: “As I said, I’m here for three years.” (Notes of a telephone conversation, October 20, 8:25 p.m.; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 360, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

In an October 21 memorandum to the President, Kissinger assessed the meeting with Dobrynin and emphasized: “Dobrynin’s basic mission was to test the seriousness of the threat element in our current posture and to throw out enough inducements (SALT, Berlin, direct informal contact with you) to make it politically and psychologically difficult for you to play it rough over Vietnam.” Kissinger went on to suggest that Nixon’s threats might give the Soviets ammunition to lobby Hanoi for a more flexible position, or at least a token concession. Kissinger also concluded that Dobrynin had no substantive adjustments to present on Vietnam and that it was “essential to continue to back up our verbal threats with military present moves.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin/HAK, 1969, [part 1]) From October 13–30, Nixon authorized the Joint Chiefs of Staff to place portions of the U.S. military on heightened alert (JCS Readiness Test). Documentation on this subject is in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XXXIV, National Security, 1969–1972.

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**140. Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to Secretary of Defense Laird<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, October 24, 1969.

SUBJECT

North Vietnam Contingency Plan

The President has requested that a contingency plan be prepared for the conduct of a three-day, retaliatory air and naval campaign against North Vietnam. This plan would be in addition to those now in preparation as a result of the President’s meeting with you and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on October 11, 1969.<sup>2</sup>

The objective of the attack would be to impose maximum damage against remunerative military and war-supporting targets within a

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 1, Chronological File, 1969 October–November. Top Secret; Sensitive.

<sup>2</sup> See Document 136.

short time in order to demonstrate the ability and willingness of the United States to resume full-scale air and naval operations against North Vietnam. The following additional guidance is provided:

- a. Operations against NVN will be in response to enemy provocation, and will apply the maximum feasible level of effort.
- b. Initial launch of aircraft will be within 72 hours following a Presidential decision.
- c. The plan should emphasize primarily attacks against enemy military targets, including stockpiles in the Haiphong Port area, and secondarily against high value economic targets.
- d. Risk of civilian casualties should be minimized.
- e. Naval surface forces will support the retaliatory attack to the extent feasible.
- f. Mining operations will not be authorized.

In addition to the above, it is requested that the President be provided with an estimate of U.S. aircraft losses under two conditions:

- a. Concentrated attack against the enemy air and air defense system, such as envisioned in the Pruning Knife plan.
- b. More limited attacks against the enemy air and air defense targets necessary to provide minimum essential protection to the strike forces.

**Henry A. Kissinger**

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**141. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, October 28, 1969.

SUBJECT

Troop Replacements

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1320, Unfiled Material, 1969, 6 of 19. Top Secret; Eyes Only. At the bottom of the first page are the following handwritten notes by Nixon: "1. MeI should *increase* the V. Nam weapons & training program. I still think the military is foot dragging. 2. Ask Bunker to pass a sanitized version of this assessment through channels to State."



Attached at Tab A is a report from Ambassador Bunker<sup>2</sup> of his conversations with President Thieu on troop replacements:<sup>3</sup>

Thieu made the following points, inter alia:

—South Vietnamese defense leaders believe that without changing draft laws there are adequate manpower resources to replace about 150,000 US troops next year.

—In order to replace 150,000 US troops, the Vietnamese force strength planned for the end of 1970 would have to be increased to 1,100,000.

—Any new replacements should not be made until March or April 1970.

—Announcing US intentions to pull out the bulk of its combat troops would not have adverse political or morale effects in South Vietnam but the timing of reductions should be kept secret.

—Modern weaponry supplied by the US is essential if the morale and effectiveness of the People's Self Defense Force is to be improved.

Mr. Bunker offered, inter alia, the following preliminary observations:

—We should encourage Thieu to proceed with planning for an expanded strength of 1,100,000.

—Before fixing next year's schedule, we should evaluate enemy plans for increased military effort.

—The announcement of an overall replacement goal of 150,000 might have adverse effects on the morale of our own troops, as well as those of the ARVN.

—If the timing of replacement plans became known, it would give considerable military advantages to the enemy.

—Thieu's approach to troop replacements, economic improvements, and pacification is impressive.

—On many counts the new government is already turning in a more effective performance than its predecessor.

Unless there is a major enemy offensive in the interim, I believe the next replacement increment should be announced in early Decem-

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<sup>2</sup> Tab A, attached but not printed, is a retyped version of backchannel message 226 from Saigon, October 25, sent from Bunker to Kissinger. The original message is *ibid.*, NSC Files, Box 65, Vietnam Subject Files, 8-A, All Backchannel, Vol. II, 10/69.

<sup>3</sup> An earlier discussion between Bunker and Thieu on October 17, regarding Vietnamization, manpower issues, infiltration, a cease-fire, land reform, Thieu's image in the United States, Thieu's political base, pacification, and the economic situation is in telegram 20975 from Saigon, October 18. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 27 VIET S)

ber before the pressure surrounding December 15 has had a chance to build. The period for accomplishing the next replacement probably should cover a longer time interval and thus encompass a larger withdrawal increment.

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#### 142. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, October 30, 1969.

##### SUBJECT

Ambassador Bunker's Assessment of the Vietnam Situation

Ambassador Bunker has submitted his personal appraisal of the overall Vietnam situation to you in the attached cable (Tab A).<sup>2</sup> His assessment is pegged to the total political, military, economic and social climate for successful Vietnamization of the war.

The Ambassador concludes that very substantial progress has been made in many areas, although serious problems and deficiencies remain. Probably the most unsettling problem is apprehension about US intentions. Bunker particularly fears the effect on South Vietnamese morale of a precipitous withdrawal of US forces, or a fixed timetable that would put the reductions on an automatic basis. He believes that carefully paced Vietnamization will work if carried out with enough flexibility to counter any enemy moves.

Ambassador Bunker makes the following major points on the war situation:

##### *The Government*

—Khiem's government is an improvement over its predecessor. It is more of a team, and is focusing hard on major problems.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 56, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Vietnam Policy Documents, 1969 September–November. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Sent for information. On the first page of this memorandum is the following handwritten notation: "Note page 9 [of Tab A] we must have this base covered in our December assessment." On page 9 of Tab A, Nixon underlined the following sentence in paragraph 30: "It is important that the public in Viet Nam sees that the GVN has a role in decision making."

<sup>2</sup> Tab A, attached but not printed, is a re-typed verbatim version of backchannel message 287 from Saigon, October 29, from Bunker to the President. The original copy is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 65, Vietnam Subject Files, 8–A, All Backchannel, Vol. II, 10/69.

—Organizationally, the GVN has not been very successful in broadening its political base. Nevertheless, it is getting increased grass roots support and is doing a better job of local administration. It is broadening the base from the bottom up, not from the top down.

#### *The Military*

—Ambassador Bunker echoes General Abrams' view that there has been continuing improvement in the RVNAF, that gains from here on will be more qualitative than quantitative, and that significant problems remain, among them high desertions and poor leadership.

—The ARVN casualty rate, and that of the enemy faced by ARVN, has gone up in recent weeks, indicating that the combat load of the ARVN is increasing.

—US force reductions have so far not hurt ARVN morale. A precipitous US withdrawal would probably totally undercut all the GVN military gains, however. A carefully phased withdrawal, on the other hand, might tend to raise ARVN confidence in its ability to take over and hence raise ARVN morale.

#### *Enemy Intentions*

—The enemy is definitely trying to provide facilities in Laos for potential infiltration considerably in excess of current rates.

—The latest captured enemy resolution on strategy suggests an intent to try and block our piecemeal withdrawals by hitting ARVN and US troops and upsetting redeployment schedules. The objective is to force a complete US withdrawal.

—There are other signs, however, that the enemy may be planning only to continue his present, low-posture military efforts. It is possible that he has not yet decided and is leaving his options open.

#### *Pacification*

—The emphasis is now on consolidation of the substantial gains made this year. The GVN is trying to build depth and breadth into the program.

—This is partly reflected in the already sizeable expansion of the territorial security forces and other civil defense elements.

—There is a much improved climate throughout the countryside in terms of economic revival and popular livelihood.

—The program is still thin and vulnerable, however. The infrastructure has been damaged, but not destroyed.

#### *The Economy*

—We are at a critical point in which the GVN will have to fill in behind US withdrawals with substantial additional expenditures. Un-

less the GVN takes strong measures to up its own revenues, and the US adds to our economic aid, inflationary pressures could [worsen].

—The GVN is moving hard to do its share, and has taken austerity measures beyond our expectations in raising taxes.

*The Future of Vietnamization*

—Bunker supports Thieu's proposal to expand the RVNAF to 1,100,000 by the end of 1970 with special emphasis on territorial forces.

—He believes there is a serious question as to whether any fixed schedule for overall US troop replacements should be announced until we have a better reading on enemy military intentions in early 1970.

—He mainly fears the psychological blow to the Vietnamese if, in the face of a major enemy offensive, "automatic" US redeployments were to continue.

—If a fixed schedule is to be announced, Bunker favors a range tied to a later reassessment of progress.

*A Ceasefire*

—The Ambassador believes we should continue to insist on a ceasefire tied to proper agreements on verification of the withdrawal of NVA forces.

—He has not had the opportunity to discuss this question in detail yet with Thieu, but Thieu has generally taken the position that the present allied stance on a ceasefire is a viable one which should be maintained.

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**143. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, October 30, 1969.

SUBJECT

Assumptions Underlying Vietnamization

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 252, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Vietnam Policy Documents, 1969 July–December. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information. Kissinger prints almost all of this memorandum in *White House Years*, pp. 285–286.

We have seen so many Vietnam programs fail after being announced with great fanfare, that I thought I should put before you in summary form my questions about the assumptions underlying Vietnamization. To believe that this course is viable, we must make favorable assumptions about a number of factors, and must believe that Hanoi as well will come to accept them.

U.S. calculations about the success of Vietnamization—and *Hanoi's* calculations, in turn, about the success of *their* strategy—rely on our respective judgments of:

—*the pace of public opposition in the U.S. to our continuing the fight in any form.* (Past experience indicates that Vietnamization will not significantly slow it down.)

—*the ability of the U.S. Government to maintain its own discipline in carrying out this policy.* (As public pressures grow, you may face increasing governmental disarray with a growing number of press leaks, etc.)<sup>2</sup>

—*the actual ability of the South Vietnamese Government and armed forces to replace American withdrawals—both physically and psychologically.* (Conclusive evidence is lacking here; this fact in itself, and past experience, argue against optimism.)

—*the degree to which Hanoi's current losses affect its ability to fight later—i.e., losses of military cadre, political infra-structure, etc.* (Again, the evidence is not definitive. Most reports of progress have concerned security gains by U.S. forces—not a lasting erosion of enemy political strength.)<sup>3</sup>

—*the ability of the GVN to gain solid political benefit from its current pacification progress.* (Again, reports of progress have been largely about security gains behind the U.S. shield.)

Our Vietnamization policy thus rests on a series of favorable assumptions which may not be accurate—although no one can be certain on the basis of current analyses.

I am asking the Vietnam Special Studies Group to see what can be done to minimize the dangers involved.

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<sup>2</sup> Nixon highlighted the first two subparagraphs and wrote: "Nov 9 We seem to have a better chance now on these points *than before Nov 3.*" Reference is to Nixon's speech of November 3; see Document 144.

<sup>3</sup> Nixon underlined the last 5 words of this sentence and wrote: "Ask Thompson [Sir Robert] what he predicts on this score."

#### 144. Editorial Note

On November 3, 1969, at 9:32 p.m., President Nixon gave an address to the nation on Vietnam that was broadcast on national television. This address came to be known as the “silent majority speech” from Nixon’s appeal for support for his policy from “the great silent majority of Americans” to counter the large-scale anti-Vietnam war demonstrations. The full text of the speech is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1969*, pages 901–909. In his memoirs, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, the President recounts the drafting and the rationale of his speech. (pages 404–413) Henry Kissinger in *White House Years* provides his insight on the speech and its preparation. (pages 306–309)

At Kissinger’s request a number of key advisers offered advice on the speech. In an October 23 memorandum to Kissinger, Laird suggested that the main themes of the speech should be that the United States had a program to accomplish its main objective in Vietnam—Vietnamization—and that a positive momentum had been established in implementing that program. (Washington National Records Center, Chronological Files of the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Defense: FRC 330 74 0045, Signer’s Copies, October 1969) Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge sent Kissinger a letter on October 17 in response to a request from Nixon for “some thoughts on why we cannot ‘bug out.’” Lodge suggested that a further reduction of troops, 40,000 to 50,000, plus the offer to negotiate a cease-fire would help prevent a “bug out.” (Massachusetts Historical Society, Papers of Henry Cabot Lodge II, Reel 9) Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Marshall Green, gave Kissinger his thoughts on the speech, Vietnamization, future reliance on the Guam (Nixon) Doctrine, and additional troop withdrawals in a letter of October 21. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 74, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam (General Files), 9/69–11/69) John Holdridge of the National Security Council Staff responded to a Kissinger request in a memorandum of October 17 and attached a long statement detailing the Nixon administration’s progress toward a solution on Vietnam. (Ibid., Box 139, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Memos and Miscellaneous, XI-B, 10/17/69–10/31/69)

In backchannel message 169 from Saigon, October 22, Bunker informed Kissinger that, as instructed, he had informed Thieu that “U.S. policy on war will not change” and war protests would not change the policy. Bunker also stated that speculation that Nixon would announce a unilateral cease-fire proposal in his November 3 speech was false. In backchannel message 353 from Saigon, November 3, Bunker reported that he showed Thieu an outline of Nixon’s address, and Thieu was not only “satisfied” but he was “much pleased.” Thieu promised to give the outline to no one. (Both *ibid.*, Box 65, Vietnam Subject Files,

8–A, All Backchannel, Vol. 3, Nov. 1969) In a November 3 memorandum to Nixon, Rogers outlined how U.S. allies were being consulted on the speech and, at the President's request, described how the Department was developing "a game plan designed to encourage international support for the policies set forth in your address." (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 27 VIET S)

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#### 145. Memorandum of Conversation<sup>1</sup>

Washington, November 5, 1969, noon.

##### PARTICIPANTS

Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs  
Ambassador William Sullivan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs  
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
John H. Holdridge, Senior Staff Member, NSC

##### SUBJECT

Remarks by Ambassadors Green and Sullivan Concerning Vietnam

After a few opening comments concerning the President's speech<sup>2</sup> and the desirability of getting reactions in as soon as possible, the conversation focussed on recent developments in Vietnam. Dr. Kissinger asked what might happen next in Paris, to which Ambassador Sullivan replied that the Communists in his opinion were likely to stone wall in Paris while increasing military pressure in the field. He mentioned that a step-up in the rate of infiltration had taken place since October 23, and that over 5,000 NVA troops were now in the pipeline—as many as had infiltrated in the whole period from April to October.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 140, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. XII, 1–15 November 1969. Secret; Nodis. Holdridge sent this memorandum to Kissinger under cover of a memorandum of November 12, on which Kissinger wrote: "note change on p. 3. No distribution. HK" Prior to this discussion, Kissinger and Sullivan talked on the telephone at 3:10 p.m. on November 4. According to notes of the discussion, Kissinger told Sullivan that "Habib was not to make any modifications on what he had previously said" and that "the President was determined that we don't make any new proposals in Paris. . . . On threat of death K said there will be no new proposals." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 361, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

<sup>2</sup> See Document 144.

A build-up north of the DMZ was also possible, with perhaps an attack directly across the DMZ. If military action of this sort occurred, we would need to take appropriate measures, perhaps even bombing north of the DMZ.

Dr. Kissinger mentioned that the Communist build-up in the Delta was obvious to everybody, and asked if there was any plan on what to do about it. Sullivan said that nothing more than the normal increase of South Vietnamese forces was contemplated, but dismissed the Communist build-up as not being big enough to worry about. To him, the Communist threat to the special forces camps of Bu Prang and Duc Lap was politically more significant, and the Communists had the capability to take these camps. However, it was General Abrams' view that the situation was not all that serious. The number of 5,000 infiltrators was not in itself of major significance.

Dr. Kissinger wondered if the Communists had ever meant to settle the war by negotiations. He noted that in May and June it had looked as if things might get moving. Could we have done more, and what froze the Communists up? Ambassadors Green and Sullivan said in reply that the Communists had in their negotiating position blasted Vietnamization and US troop withdrawals as a major factor, and they were inclined to take the Communist rationale at face value.

Continuing, Sullivan mentioned that what had intrigued him most in that period was the May 31 speech of Le Duc Tho<sup>3</sup>—Tho had asked if we would agree to discuss everything on the table, i.e., both the 8 point and 10 point programs, and have a cease-fire. Sullivan speculated, though, that Ho Chi Minh's illness plus the influence of the US peacenicks and the growing American intellectual split had caused the Communists to back off.

Ambassador Green noted that our intelligence had brought out a coincidence between the July 20 Plaine de Jarres offensive and the South Vietnam situation. This has been an important anniversary, and we all had reached the conclusion it was a big date. Perhaps the Communists had then anticipated that a major move was to be expected from the US, such as proposing a cease-fire. There therefore might have been something significant in the Communist pull-back from Muong Soui. He had been told by both Khampan and Champassak that they were dissatisfied with the explanation that the Communist forces pulled back from Muong Soui solely because they ran out of food.

The conversation then turned to the question of a cease-fire, with Dr. Kissinger asking why the Communists might want one. Sullivan

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<sup>3</sup> See Document 75.



spoke of the attrition of Communist forces, which was continuing to the point where they were not contesting the GVN's pacification efforts. He thought that in a few more months the Communists would be put in a position of making the choice between stepping up the war and making a major infiltration effort, or else taking some steps to protect the integrity of their forces. A cease-fire would be such a step. Dr. Kissinger recalled that there had been no discussion of a cease-fire by the Communists, to which Sullivan speculated that they would prefer the offer to come from us rather than from them. Dr. Kissinger noted that all they needed to do was to send the Soviets to us on this issue and ask us what we meant.

Sullivan mentioned the effort being launched by the Archbishops of Saigon and Danang to contact all four parties in Paris. He thought that this effort was probably in connection with a cease-fire proposal, which we for our part would not oppose.

Dr. Kissinger doubted that if the Communists were in such bad shape as Sullivan had suggested, they would favor a cease-fire. He could not see the logic. Sullivan speculated that if the Communists took the initiative they could gain a propaganda advantage by linking a cease-fire appeal, which would be popular in the US, with a coalition government. He thought, therefore, that we should propose a cease-fire first so as to preempt the Communists. Dr. Kissinger felt that we could easily explore with Thieu the meaning of a cease-fire without asking for one.

Dr. Kissinger remarked upon the US domestic implications of a cease-fire and wondered whether there was a desire for one which we were blocking because we simply didn't understand the implications. Should the President have proposed one? Sullivan thought that such a proposal would have been a gimmick, but Ambassador Green thought that it might be useful as an argument to the people back here as well as to head the Communists off.

After a few references to the Fulbright Hearings on Vietnam, Sullivan elaborated on the advantages of a cease-fire, by noting that if our position remained unchanged and the Communists did revert to stepped-up military action, they could give us a great problem with Saigon as well as with public opinion here by at some later stage proposing a cease-fire linked with a coalition government. Again, he thought that we should get there first.

Dr. Kissinger pointed out that if we were to make the offer first, the Communists could always counter by calling for a complete US troop withdrawal and a coalition government.

Following some further discussion of the pros and cons of a cease-fire, with some reference to the possibility of increased Communist military action occurring next February or March, as Deputy Ambassador

Berger believed might happen, Dr. Kissinger stated that if a paper containing a recommendation on a cease-fire came from them, Ambassadors Green and Sullivan, he would see that it was considered by the President even if it did not have JCS clearance. (Ambassador Green noted that the absence of such clearance on a paper already extant was the reason it had not been sent.)

The conversation shifted back to the fact that Ambassador Bunker had been authorized to discuss a cease-fire with Thieu, along with other issues, but nothing had been heard from him. Ambassador Green raised the possibility that Bunker might have been communicating directly with the White House by “back channels”, to which Dr. Kissinger emphatically rejected the idea that any such communication had taken place on the subject of a cease-fire.<sup>4</sup>

In conclusion, Ambassador Green raised the matter of our Ambassador in Warsaw making contact with the Chinese Communist Chargé. The first opportunity to make such contact at a social occasion would come at the end of the month, but was there any objection to operating overtly? Direct contact could be made via a call at the Chinese Embassy. Dr. Kissinger said that he saw no objection to such direct contacts, but added that there was no problem either, in getting together overtly—in fact we preferred it.

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<sup>4</sup> At this point, Kissinger crossed out “or would take place” and wrote “on the subject of a ceasefire.”

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**146. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, November 12, 1969.

SUBJECT

Planning of Military Operations in Laos

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 546, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. III, 11 October 1969–31 January 1970. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for action.

After reading a recent CIA memorandum on Vang Pao's offensive in the Plain of Jars, I raised questions about the planning of Lao military operations (Tab A).<sup>2</sup>

State, Defense and CIA have prepared a coordinated reply (Tab B)<sup>3</sup> which indicates that:

—U.S. ability to control (including veto) a Lao operation is to all practical purposes complete because U.S. matériel and air support are vital.

—In practice, most operations are conceived by commanders of individual Military Regions in close conjunction with U.S. Military Attachés, or in the case of Vang Pao and the other irregulars, with the local CIA Area Chief.

—In brief, the following U.S. clearance procedures are followed:

—The cognizant U.S. military attaché or CIA Area Chief forwards the request to U.S. Country Team, consisting of Ambassador, DCM, Military Attachés and CIA Station Chief.

—Vang Pao's operations are also cleared by the CIA base at Udom, Thailand which assesses the Agency's ability to provide necessary support.

—The Ambassador requests authorization from State for politically sensitive operations or activities exceeding established operating procedures and refers requests for air support to MACV.

—Although U.S. and Lao planners generally decide in advance on the objectives, goals, and scope of Lao operations, it sometimes becomes difficult to restrain an operation once underway.

U.S. authorities in Laos are deeply involved in planning and providing support for military operations undertaken by the Lao Government and irregular forces. I believe that the U.S. role is an inevitable consequence of the Vietnam war and the increasing North Vietnamese activities in Laos. However, the following aspects of current procedures are cause for some concern:

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<sup>2</sup> Tab A, attached but not printed, is an October 23 memorandum from Kissinger to Rogers, Laird, and Helms transmitting Nixon's questions about direction of policy on Laos. Kissinger wrote: "The President has noted with interest reports of Vang Pao's recent offensive in North Central Laos, and has posed certain related questions: a. Who plans Laotian offensives? b. Who establishes the objectives, concepts and associated parameters for conduct of military operations in Laos? c. What specific procedures are followed in conjunction with a. and b., above?" Kissinger requested that the Department of State coordinate the three agencies' responses and reply by October 28. The signed original is *ibid.*, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 27 LAOS.

<sup>3</sup> Tab B, attached but not printed, is the coordinated paper Theodore L. Eliot, Jr., Executive Secretary of the Department of State, sent to Kissinger under a covering memorandum of October 28 in which Eliot stated that the paper was prepared in response to Kissinger's memorandum of October 23. The Department of State copy is *ibid.*

—Since senior Lao authorities are often not informed until planning is well along, a conflict might develop if Souvanna were to interpose objections on political grounds to what we considered imperative from a military standpoint.

—Although the Ambassador and his Country Team exercise control over planning and operations, they apparently are not under continuing and direct control of any higher military or political authority. The Ambassador, in effect, runs his own Theater of Operations.

—Once an operation is actually under way, it becomes subject to the decisions of Lao commanders such as Vang Pao, and our ability to influence events becomes circumscribed.

—There seems more emphasis on tactics than on a coordinated strategy.

*Recommendation:*<sup>4</sup>

If you approve, I will consult with the Secretaries of State and Defense, and the Director of CIA on measures which might be taken to improve the degree of control exercised over military planning and operations in Laos.

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<sup>4</sup> Nixon initialed the approve option.

**147. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Saigon, November 15, 1969, 1128Z.

564. Ref: WH92979<sup>2</sup>

1. General Abrams and I have discussed subject of reference telegram and submit our joint preliminary views. In considering the timing and magnitude of the next U.S. troop withdrawal, we believe following factors should be taken into account.

- a) The enemy has begun his winter/spring offensive.
- b) Truck traffic has resumed in the Laos panhandle.
- c) Some infiltration groups have been identified indication resumption of infiltration on a modest scale.
- d) Enemy's 24B regiment has moved into the western DMZ and all three regiments of his 324B regiment are now in Laos opposite Thua Thien.
- e) Level of hostilities has increased quite sharply during the last month. Enemy losses have increased each week since October 18 from a low point for the week ending October 18 of 1,624 KIA; enemy losses for this week were approximately 3,500. Friendly losses have also increased, particularly RVNAF. For the current week, they will be 82 percent of friendly losses.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 65, Vietnam Subject Files, 8-A, All Backchannel, Vol. III, November 1969. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Kissinger sent a retyped verbatim copy of this message to President Nixon under cover of a November 28 memorandum in which he summarized the major points raised by Bunker. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 140, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. XII-2, 15–30 November 1969)

<sup>2</sup> In backchannel message WH 92979, November 14, Kissinger informed Bunker that the President wanted Bunker's and Abrams' view on two alternatives: (a) an announcement in mid-December of a withdrawal of 60,000 U.S. troops to be completed in mid-April 1970, or (b) an announcement at the same time of a withdrawal of 100,000 to be completed by the end of June. Kissinger noted that (a) would be more palatable to Saigon, but (b) would be more flexible. (Ibid., Box 65, Vietnam Subject Files, 8-A, All Backchannel, Vol. III, November 1969)

2. General Abrams' last assessment of progress in Vietnamization was forwarded to JCS October 27.<sup>3</sup> A new assessment will be sent November 23.<sup>4</sup>

3. In my personal assessment which I sent to the President October 29 (MY 287),<sup>5</sup> I said that I believed there is a serious question whether we should fix any overall schedule for replacements during the next year before we know more about the magnitude of the upcoming enemy effort; and that flexibility in our planning of any announcement of targets is of great importance. This would probably also apply to a half year period. The principle of flexibility was also expressed in the President's 3 November speech. It is true that Vietnamization has progressed steadily and that the Vietnamese forces are improving and taking on a greater share of the combat, taking an increasing proportion of casualties and inflicting more than 50 percent of casualties on the enemy. But they have still much to learn professionally.

4. In my talk with President Thieu (reported in MY 226)<sup>6</sup> he stressed the need to improve and train forces to replace U.S. withdrawals. He suggested that it would, therefore, be advisable to defer, if possible, further replacements until March 1970.

5. In view of the above considerations, General Abrams and I believe it is preferable to follow the "cut and try" method of deciding on troop withdrawals which has been used to date. We, therefore, prefer alternative A, but we are not yet prepared to give an opinion of the number which we believe could be safely withdrawn.

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<sup>3</sup> MAC telegram 13922, October 27, Abrams to Wheeler. Holdridge sent Kissinger an October 28 memorandum in which he enclosed a copy of MAC 13922, and summarized its major points. Holdridge stated that MAC 13922 dealt mostly with Communist activity in the Laos panhandle and commented as follows: "MACV's assessment of the activities along the logistic network seems sound, although we have seen this developing for some weeks, and it really does not tell us much about over-all DRV intentions for it is reasonable to assume that Hanoi would try to keep Communist forces up to reasonable strength in SVN regardless of what it planned in the way of military action for 1970—unless, of course, it was planning a wholesale withdrawal of NVA forces. It looks like we can rule the latter out." (Ibid., Box 140, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam Memos & Misc. XI-B, 10/17/69–10/31/69)

<sup>4</sup> The assessment was transmitted in telegram MAC 15163, Abrams to Wheeler, November 24. Holdridge prepared an assessment of this telegram for Kissinger on November 24 and Kissinger saw it the next day. Holdridge characterized Abrams' assessment as: "sounds like many we have read over the years, all of them implying that we are more or less on a military treadmill in SVN. The key question now appears to be whether we can get off effectively via Vietnamization and allow the South Vietnamese to take our place." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 140, Vietnam Country Files, Vol. XII-2, 1–15 November 1969)

<sup>5</sup> Summarized in Document 142.

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 2, Document 141.

6. If a decision is made in line with the larger figure suggested in alternative B, we believe it would be preferable to make separate announcements for three individual increments.

7. We suggest that it is important that I be authorized to talk with President Thieu and General Abrams authorized to talk with the Minister of Defense and General Vien as soon as possible. We believe that with the completion of General Abrams' assessment and after obtaining views of our Vietnamese counterparts, we shall be able to submit our views in more definite form.

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**148. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, November 15, 1969.

SUBJECT

Your Meeting with Secretary Rogers, Secretary Laird, The Attorney General, and Mr. Kissinger, 10:30 a.m., November 15, 1969

Secretaries Rogers and Laird, Attorney General Mitchell and I will meet with you to discuss issues left over from the plane trip from Key Biscayne. You will wish to review the forthcoming key issues on the Vietnam situation.

*Major Issues*

1. *Ceasefire:*

—There has been a fairly constant flow of suggestions from various sources favoring a U.S. initiative for a ceasefire proposal. Secretary Rogers may support this position—certainly Marshall Green does and we have just received a paper from Ambassador Sullivan which is strongly slanted to favor a U.S. proposal for a ceasefire and which he

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 140, Vietnam Country Files, Vol. XII, 1–15 November 1969. Top Secret; Sensitive. Nixon met with Kissinger, Laird, Mitchell, and Rogers from 10:20 a.m. to 12:28 p.m., November 15. (President's Daily Diary, November 15; *ibid.*, White House Central Files) No other record of this meeting has been found.

has already sent to Saigon.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the Senate resolution which was drawn from the House Resolution and modified by Senator Mansfield also contains a proposal for ceasefire.

—*Your View:*

(1) In general, we have already expressed a willingness to discuss mutually agreed-upon ceasefire with guarantees and in coordination with the GVN.

(2) You have and will continue to reject unilateral ceasefire.

(3) For the time being and in the light of the support your November 3 speech has generated, we should avoid any new proposals on Vietnam, including ceasefire, until Hanoi has had an opportunity to ponder carefully the strong domestic support for your position.

(4) Concerning the Senate (Mansfield) Resolution, we should take the position that the ceasefire proposal contained in the resolution is a reiteration of our already stated position rather than to highlight it as a new initiative from which new proposals should result.

(5) You should discourage any effort to make the ceasefire seem like a bold, new step.

## 2. Troop Withdrawals:

—There are two issues: (1) the timing and size of the next withdrawal increment; and (2) the longer term program for troop withdrawal.

—*Next Increment:* You are presently considering three alternative plans which would provide for the withdrawal of:

(1) 50,000 troops over a three-month period.

(2) 60,000 troops over a 4½ month period or,

(3) 100,000 troops over a 6½ month period.

—*Your View:* You may wish to point out that you favor (1) or (2) since we are now in the wake of a positive public attitude and since this will give you flexibility later on to consider the announcement of a larger increment should the conditions favor it. Also, a smaller increment now will confirm that you are not succumbing to Dove pressures just four weeks after your strong stand on November 3.

—You may wish to inform the group that you anticipate making the next increment withdrawal announcement during mid-December and you might ask for the group's views on this timing and the form in which the announcement should be made.

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<sup>2</sup> Sullivan sent the study to Kissinger on November 10. In a November 13 covering memorandum to Kissinger, Holdridge summarized the study and suggested that, "essentially this is the same type of special pleading which you received from Ambassador Sullivan personally in your conversation with him and Assistant Secretary Green on November 5." Kissinger wrote the following comment on Holdridge's memorandum: "Unacceptable. Backchannel Bunker & Lodge to take care *not* to push progress." (Ibid.) For Kissinger's conversation with Green and Sullivan, see Document 145.



—*Longer Term Program*: You have consistently maintained that you wish to retain flexibility applying the three criteria rather than be restricted to a fixed, predetermined time schedule on troop withdrawals. Secretary Rogers appears to favor the adoption of a predetermined time schedule for the overall program. On the return flight from Key Biscayne last weekend, he stated that he could not testify on the Hill that we have a “plan” if you do not approve such a schedule.

—*Your View*: I recommend that you reiterate the need to maintain flexibility on the longer term program so that we do not find ourselves harnessed to a fixed, inflexible schedule which would not be responsive to changing conditions and which would very likely soon become the target of attack by the Doves with the claim that it is inadequate.

—For the above reasons you are considering two alternative plans—one which would contemplate a minimum withdrawal program and another which would contemplate a maximum program. You may wish to direct Secretary Laird to proceed accordingly.

—I have discussed the foregoing with both Secretary Laird<sup>3</sup> and Attorney General Mitchell and they are in full accord with this flexible approach. Both agree that it constitutes a sound plan upon which to proceed and are prepared to endorse it completely.

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<sup>3</sup> On November 14 at 7 p.m. Kissinger talked to Laird on the telephone. The notes of their conversation read: “K wanted to give Laird, for his own information, the current thinking of the President. The Pres. feels that he is in pretty good shape on Vietnam and doesn’t want to get triggered on dramatic initiatives. He thinks he has the doves for once. He would like to see impact of unity on Hanoi.” Kissinger then told Laird that the President did not want to make the “ceasefire look like a hot new item.” As for troop withdrawals, “K said the Pres is beginning to lean for the smaller one and the bigger one in March and give them another slug in September.” Kissinger asked “how would withdrawing 50,000 troops by April work? Laird thought that would be fine.” (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 361, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

**149. Notes of Telephone Conversation Between Senator J. William Fulbright and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, November 24, 1969, 6:35 p.m.

K wanted Fulbright to know that the President had approved the idea of K meeting with members of the committee. Fulbright and K decided that 4:30 on December 4 would be convenient for both of them and it would take place at the Senator's Office in the New Senate Office Building. One point that the President wanted K to make was that we have been prepared to discuss political matters with the North Vietnamese since May and every private meeting we have had has been at our initiative—there hasn't been a single one called by them. Secondly, we have been prepared to discuss political matters (repeated this). We have told them we would discuss their 10 points if they would discuss ours and said they don't have to accept them, just discuss it. They have refused. Fulbright said they were very difficult people. K felt that if serious negotiations ever start, it will be fairly rapid. If we can only get over the hurdle and then put our big offers on the table. Fulbright said it was difficult for him to bring himself to believe that the Government has decided to get completely out. K said our problem is that we have to make Vietnamization look worse than negotiating or they won't negotiate seriously. We have to try to handle this to avoid any additional rifts in society. K added that we wouldn't have been doing things we have been doing if we didn't want to get out. K said he worked with LBJ on getting the negotiations started. LBJ handled all of the negotiations just to have alibi for continuing. K said we have to handle it in way that enables us to get greatest degree of consensus of getting things done. K was not saying that the other side doesn't have its problems. It is an enormously concerned situation. In terms of objectives, K said he didn't feel Fulbright and the WH were that far apart. K said if we have learned anything from 1956 [1954] it is that we can't afford a settlement that they won't maintain. The only sort of settlement is one which they feel is fair. Otherwise we are just buying a year or two, if that much. Fulbright said he certainly felt the urgency of it. He had never seen such concern about all sorts of things which Fulbright thinks

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 361, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking.

are related to Vietnam. K thought there was no question that this society is facing a profound psychological crisis.<sup>2</sup>

K told Fulbright that he could determine who would be present at their meeting and that he looked forward to it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The President and Kissinger discussed on November 14 Fulbright's request for Kissinger to meet with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Nixon was inclined to have Kissinger do it so long as it was on "an informal" and "trade off basis." They also discussed anti-war protests—both the October 15 moratorium and the November 15 mobilization. Nixon stated that "You cannot do it on the basis Rogers and Laird have suggested—that we buy time by troop withdrawals. K said it was a reasonable idea originally. I [Kissinger] thought it would buy us some time. As far as the organizers [of the anti-war movement] work, they would be at us just as hard. P said I think there is a much deeper conspiracy than any of us realize." Nixon continued: "I will have to nail these people. I am going to say the protestors will delay the [end of?] war. K said I think you have no choice." The conversation concluded with Kissinger and the President agreeing that Hanoi made a tactical mistake in overestimating the impact of the anti-war movement. (Notes of a telephone conversation, November 14; *ibid.*)

<sup>3</sup> No substantive record of this meeting has been found.

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### 150. Notes of Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>

Washington, November 25, 1969, 6:30 p.m.

[Omitted here is discussion of the elimination of chemical warfare.] K mentioned that Xuan Thuy made another statement today saying that private talks were essential.<sup>2</sup> Whatever his reasons were. . . . We have no problem with that. The President said they are at least talking about talking which they haven't before. He suggested that maybe K move up his channel—strike before Lodge screws it up. K mentioned that Lodge will be out on Dec. 6 and Habib will be here Monday.<sup>3</sup> K indicated that he wanted to talk to Thompson and then he could get in touch with Walters. Walters could say we want appointment after

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking.

<sup>2</sup> On November 24 in an interview with the *New York Times*, Xuan Thuy charged that the United States was unwilling to discuss any questions but troop withdrawals in private sessions. On November 25 Xuan Thuy reiterated his call for resumption of private talks. (Stanley Millet, ed., *South Vietnam: U.S.-Communist Confrontation in Southeast Asia*, Vol. 4, 1969, pp. 146–148)

<sup>3</sup> December 1.

the weekend of Dec. 13. K said he would warn them against an offensive and add that a lot of things are possible if we set necessary deadlines for working it out. The President said it just could be that they are hurting. K indicated that on several occasions they were beginning to blink. One of the things that is happening in State is that they are going on big operation on ceasefire. The President asked, why, they have already turned it down. K thought it would be taken as a sign of weakness. We should have a low-key Christmas ceasefire. We won't get any points for making it four days rather than 2. We can say we are willing to negotiate generally whenever they are ready. The President said, let us use this period for a general ceasefire. K thought and suggested that we should announce soon that we are ready for Christmas for two days and in that announcement say we are always ready to negotiate general ceasefire. The President told K to try to get State around to this. K said that was a biggest obstacle, to keep them from getting away with more than the Japanese have already conceded (K switched the conversation to mention point about getting State to go along). K mentioned that he let Johnson see the memcon.<sup>4</sup> K said what is more important is that Sato made personal commitment to the President. The President said Sato was pleased—they expected worse treatment and we gave them a good deal. Back to the ceasefire—K said we should play ceasefire low key. We have them going without offering a lot. If they said they would settle in three months, that's when we should make our offer. The President said, at the present time on the other ceasefire thing, the main thing now is to get us some time. He didn't even want to consider this until after troop thing and we don't expect that until Dec. 20. K said he would recommend that the President announce a Christmas ceasefire within the next two weeks so he can get ahead of the others. Then the President is not following their lead. The President said what difference does it make on 2 or 3 days. Lets make it 2 days then.

[Omitted here is additional discussion on chemical warfare.]

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<sup>4</sup> A memorandum of conversation between Nixon and Prime Minister Sato of Japan during Sato's visit to Washington, November 19–21, is in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIX, Japan and Korea, 1969–1972.

## 151. Memorandum of Conversation<sup>1</sup>

Washington, November 26, 1969, 6:30 p.m.

### PARTICIPANTS

GVN Ambassador Bui Diem  
Dr. Kissinger  
John H. Holdridge, NSC Senior Staff Member

### SUBJECT

Dr. Kissinger's Comments to Ambassador Bui Diem on Cease-Fire and Other Issues

Ambassador Bui Diem apologized for calling on such short notice, but explained he would feel very bad if he returned to Saigon and reported that he had not been in a position to see Dr. Kissinger.

Dr. Kissinger said that he had assumed the initiative was on his side, and that he would certainly have gotten in touch with Diem had not the latter contacted him. He wanted very much to talk on one thing, and to explain that on foreign policy matters the Administration sometimes worked on the principle of "letting 100 flowers bloom". Some of his colleagues, it seemed, had advocated a permanent cease-fire, but he had spoken to the President and wanted Diem to know that the Vietnamese Government was under no pressure in this respect. As before, we merely wanted Ambassador Bunker to discuss a general approach concerning the cease-fire issue with President Thieu so that if the other side were to act, we could respond. There was no need to link a cease-fire with a Christmas truce, unless, of course the Vietnamese wanted to do so. Incidentally, what Lodge had said that day in Paris was totally unauthorized and did not reflect Administration policy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 183, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, Memos and Miscellaneous, Vol. IV, 12/69–1/70. Secret; Nodis; Paris Meetings. Drafted by Holdridge on December 1. In sending this memorandum to Kissinger on December 1, Holdridge suggested that no distribution be made; Kissinger agreed.

<sup>2</sup> Lodge raised the possibility of a coalition government in South Vietnam that would include representatives of the NLF. In a backchannel message to Bunker, December 2, Kissinger asked Bunker to "leave no doubt in the minds of the South Vietnamese politicians as to where we [the United States] stand" on a coalition government. Kissinger informed Bunker that Nixon and Rogers had wanted him to immediately see "General Minh and Tran van Don and tell them that the U.S. will not countenance any activity designed to lead to the overthrow of the present government. Under no circumstances would we cooperate with any group which did not support the Thieu Government." Kissinger also instructed Bunker to convey to Ky the same thoughts, and to continue exploratory talks with Thieu on a cease-fire, but to assure him that no offer was contemplated at that time. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 1, Chronological File, 1969 December)

Diem noted that Lodge's remarks had been partially corrected, nevertheless they created confusion. People in Saigon would assume that because Lodge was leaving,<sup>3</sup> he could now say more than he would usually say.

Continuing, Diem said that he would take the liberty of telling his own feelings. After the October 15 demonstrations and the President's speech,<sup>4</sup> he had felt enthusiasm, which had been confirmed by the polls. He therefore had wanted to talk over next year's events with President Thieu and to prepare him for the next steps which might be taken. However, this news of the massacre had come out, and he had felt very bad over this and also over Lodge's statement. He was now quite concerned. Dr. Kissinger reiterated that what Lodge had said did not reflect Administration thinking—we were writing off Lodge's statement as a slip of the tongue.

Dr. Kissinger asked Diem if he had been urged to accept a cease-fire. Diem replied that "speaking frankly", he had talked with Secretary Rogers who had said that the cease-fire problem had come under discussion. The Secretary had spoken of the impending Christmas truce issue and had asked him what he had thought about the problem and the possibility of extending the truce into a cease-fire, to which he had replied that he doubted the Communists would accept a cease-fire, but would talk with his friends at home to see what they thought. He felt reluctant to push the matter. It was a difficult problem and a solution was not easy. On the link with a Christmas truce, last year his government had made a statement accepting a 24-hour Christmas and New Year's truce, but never before had linked it with a cease-fire. Dr. Kissinger responded that there was no need to make such a link, and that Diem should tell his President to listen to what our President said—this is where policy was made.

Diem brought up the question of the third US troop withdrawal announcement. He expressed the personal feeling that up to now the impression had been created that decisions were all taken by the same side, and that the Vietnamese had been pushed into agreeing. He wished to find a way for Vietnam to get some of the credit, to show the world that it had goodwill and that press charges to the contrary were false.

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<sup>3</sup> On behalf of the President, Kissinger accepted Lodge's resignation on November 20, effective December 8. As Lodge urged, Philip C. Habib was appointed Acting Head of the American delegation until a successor was chosen. Lawrence E. Walsh, Lodge's Deputy in Paris, also submitted his resignation on November 20 and was accepted by the President. (Backchannel message 794 from Paris, Lodge to Kissinger, November 18; Massachusetts Historical Society, Henry Cabot Lodge II Papers, Reel 9) For the official exchange of letters between President Nixon and Lodge regarding the latter's resignation, see the Department of State *Bulletin*, pp. 549–550.

<sup>4</sup> See Document 144.

Dr. Kissinger recalled his previous White House experience in the 1961 Berlin crisis as showing how difficult it was to get goodwill from the press. Nevertheless, if the Vietnamese could find a formula which would enable us to say that we were acting at the request of President Thieu in withdrawing X number of American troops, we would be willing to go along.

Diem declared that there was a need to show the people that Thieu and Ky understood the nature of the situation. Dr. Kissinger responded by stating emphatically that we had no interest in humiliating or weakening Thieu and that we knew the only way Vietnamization would work was if there was a strong Vietnamese Government. In the White House, we would do all we could to strengthen Thieu. For a variety of reasons we did not want a public brawl, but Diem could be assured that in our larger discussions we would do nothing to hurt President Thieu. Diem mentioned that he would be returning in ten days, and Dr. Kissinger asked him to call again as soon as he returned.

Diem asked Dr. Kissinger if he saw any problems in connection with Vietnamization. Should the GVN do more? Were there any difficulties which were the GVN's fault? He asked Dr. Kissinger as a friend of the Vietnamese, adding that out of his great concern for Vietnam he would appreciate an honest answer. Dr. Kissinger replied that on some issues such as land reform the White House might want the GVN to move faster, but there were no major complaints and what complaints there were could be taken care of through normal contacts. There were no issues in the Vietnamization policy, which both of us were trying in all goodwill to make work. If we wanted to "bug out" there were 500 ways to do so, but we were not going to bug out. We were not out to humiliate the GVN or Thieu or to make Thieu's life difficult. Ambassador Diem knew the problems, such as the negative position of the other side in Paris. If the other side were serious, we would work out the details of our position together. He asked, though, if they were serious.

Diem replied that he did not think so, certainly not at this time. However, he had seen during the preceding 18 months of the negotiations that every time the Communists saw they could not go beyond a certain limit, they would try to switch their position. Looking at the current situation from the standpoint of the North Vietnamese—that is, analyzing the Moratorium, the President's speech and the demonstrations—he felt that the other side had big questions in mind. While a lot of noise had been created in the US, no impression on policy had been made. Lodge had resigned, but he could have resigned at any time. Why now? The polls showed that public support for the President was soaring, and if he, Diem, were a North Vietnamese he would have to ask: "Am I right?" He would be afraid that if the trend continued in the present way, he would need to face a difficult situation

later on. The enemy had given the impression he was inflexible, but might have to do something to show that he was not all that inflexible. This was the usual tactic of the Communists. They would need to play a double game: on the one hand, to keep up their military efforts, and at the same time reassess the political situation here in Washington, the role of US public opinion and its influence on the President, and the extent to which they could inflict casualties in South Vietnam. He speculated that around January, if they had achieved nothing by then, they might switch a little bit to see what the Americans would do. Dr. Kissinger said he agreed essentially with what Diem had said.

The conversation concluded with Dr. Kissinger reiterating his words on Diem's reassuring President Thieu about President Nixon's stand—he had been instructed by President Nixon to tell Diem this—and to call again following his return from Saigon.

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## 152. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, December 1, 1969.

### SUBJECT

Cease-Fire Chronology

Recent events with respect to cease-fire proposals are illustrative of the difficulty of developing a coherent Vietnam policy. I am putting them before you in some detail because over a period of time, they make impossible any coherent policy and because they represent a fundamental challenge to your now established policy-making machinery, as well as to Presidential control.

The issue is not whether we should offer a cease-fire. At some point, we probably should. But timing is crucial and we must know what we are getting into. The State proposal would, in effect, partition South Vietnam. Before we take such a fateful and irreversible step, we must know where the line of control would be and where we will go if it is rejected.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 183, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, Memos and Miscellaneous, Vol. V, 12/69–1/70. Secret; Nodis; Paris Meetings; Plus. Sent for information/action.



*Background*

In order to provide serious, orderly consideration of the issue, in mid-October, I asked Ambassador Sullivan to have State's Vietnam Working Group prepare a paper containing the pros and cons of various cease-fire schemes.<sup>2</sup> This paper was to be submitted for NSC consideration and to be sent to Bunker for guidance in talking with Thieu on the subject.

At the same time, I worked out with Elliot Richardson a procedure under which a Special Group<sup>3</sup> would analyze the situation in the countryside to determine the area of control which would enable us to judge the implications of a cease-fire.

We arranged for Sir Robert Thompson to report at the beginning of December to you, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and the Vietnam Special Studies Group.<sup>4</sup> All these papers were to be completed by December 1.

On the basis of all this, the issue would have been put before the NSC in mid-December. The State Department, however, chose to try to circumvent this procedure and organize a bureaucratic consensus which would have limited your ability to determine the best course on the basis of an orderly review.

*Sequence of Events*

1. As you will remember, before the end of October you had a number of times turned down Secretary Rogers' proposals concerning a cease-fire.

2. You had informed the Secretaries of State and Defense in writing on November 4 that, "This is a time for us to stand on what we have offered and let Hanoi take stock and give some indication it is willing to participate in genuine negotiations. I think it would be very detrimental to our overall objective if there were any dope stories that we were offering a stand still cease-fire or any other diplomatic concession at this time."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See footnote 2, Document 148.

<sup>3</sup> The Vietnam Special Studies Group.

<sup>4</sup> See Document 158.

<sup>5</sup> The instruction has not been found. On November 26 Kissinger talked to the President on the telephone to ask if he had seen Bunker's cable of November 25 (see footnote 6 below) "in which he has shifted his position on the ceasefire to come closer to the Lodge proposal." The President responded: "Henry I want this ceasefire business knocked off. I have never visualized linking the brief holiday pause with a formal proposal on a ceasefire and I want all discussions on the formal ceasefire knocked off as of now. The only thing I want our people dealing with is a Christmas truce." The President reiterated his instructions and then told Kissinger that "All discussions of a permanently negotiated ceasefire are to stop until the National Security Council has an opportunity to consider the issue." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 361, Telephone Conversations, Chronological Files)

3. Nevertheless, on November 8 the Secretary of State tried to use the Mansfield Resolution as a vehicle for pushing his position on a cease-fire.

4. When you refused to go along with this, State, on November 10, allegedly in response to my request for options three weeks earlier, sent to the White House a study on cease-fire alternatives which did not present options but took an advocate's position. I asked for a revised version which would outline the options and provide recommendations for submission to the NSC. This has never been provided.

5. On November 20, I asked State to make proposals on a Christmas cease-fire for your consideration. No formal proposals were made.

6. On November 24, Secretary Rogers stepped into my office following the NPT signing and without being asked stated that he would let the cease-fire issue drop now in view of Xuan Thuy's statement which indicated that Hanoi opposed a cease-fire.

7. However, despite this statement, your letter of November 4, my arrangements with Under Secretary Richardson, and the request to let you consider the approach to a Christmas truce, the State Department initiated an exchange of cables with Saigon and Paris on extending the Christmas truce into a permanent, negotiated cease-fire. The sequence of these cables (which are attached at Tab B)<sup>6</sup> makes it clear that this exchange was pre-arranged by back channel. Indeed, State has admitted this to my staff.

8. In addition, the State Department tried to get the Defense Department to join it in presenting an agreed position on a permanent cease-fire which would be submitted outside the NSC framework. Secretary Laird refused and has provided us separately with a memorandum describing his position (Tab C).<sup>7</sup> He emphasizes the importance of not directly linking holiday truces with a negotiated, permanent cease-fire.

9. On November 28, Secretary Rogers forwarded a memorandum (Tab D)<sup>8</sup> to you which urgently requests your approval of a proposal which would link the holiday truce with a proposal to negotiate a permanent cease-fire.

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<sup>6</sup> Attached at Tab B, but not printed, was a chronology of Department of State cables plus copies of the cables themselves. Included were telegram 194286/Todel 3508 to Paris, November 19; telegram 17921 from Paris/Delto 2320, November 19; telegram 4151 from Saigon to the Department, November 24; telegram 1881120 from Paris/Delto 2343, November 24; and telegram 23716 from Saigon to the Department, November 26.

<sup>7</sup> Tab C, a memorandum from Rogers to Kissinger, November 28, is attached but not printed.

<sup>8</sup> Tab D is attached but not printed.

*Significance*

1. *Presidential Control.* State's actions were in violation of written Presidential directives. The Department ignored repeated White House requests for formal recommendations. The Secretary of State's efforts to line up other Cabinet officers without your knowledge on such an issue is a direct challenge to Presidential control. Dean Acheson has written that he never met with other Cabinet officers without Presidential permission lest he limit the President's freedom of action.

2. *Bureaucratic Procedure.* The NSC system is designed to avoid situations like this, and State had no good reason to try to circumvent it. The procedure which was set up to consider this question included full State representation. Richardson was involved at every step. State chairs the first committee through which the issue would pass and is represented on the Review Group and NSC. Its efforts were designed to avoid discussion.

3. *Substance.* I do not doubt that we will wish to offer a cease-fire at some point, but I do not believe that this is the right moment:

a. We have not yet worked out the implications of a cease-fire with regard to territorial control, etc. We therefore would not know exactly what we were proposing. (This is not the first time that the bureaucracy has attempted to push you into a course of which we did not know the consequences—e.g., the Middle East.)

b. We have not yet discussed the matter properly with the GVN.

c. With another troop cut coming up a simultaneous withdrawal offer could undercut our position completely and give an impression of extreme weakness.

Your stand on the 3rd of November<sup>9</sup> was taken in the face of repeated counsel to offer further concessions. You ignored this advice and consequently recouped much of the ground lost through the lack of interdepartmental discipline over the late spring, summer and early fall. We are in a relatively strong position again.

The issue is not simply whether we should now weaken our position by offering another specific concession.

There is another, very important problem involved. We don't know what the exact effect of the cease-fire would be. But we do know that it would mean some sort of partition. The effect of our pushing now for a cease-fire would therefore be to put us in the position of having accepted the principle of partition—whether or not the other side accepted our actual cease-fire offer. This could easily wreck the Saigon Government. In fact, this is probably its chief attraction to some of its proponents.

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<sup>9</sup> Reference is to Nixon's speech to the nation on Vietnam; see Document 144.

Thus, to push for a cease-fire now would be to adopt a course with uncertain specific results while making a new concession in principle. We cannot take such a fateful step without full consideration by the President.

*Recommendation:*

In view of the importance of this issue, I strongly recommend that you sign the attached letter (Tab A) to the Secretary of State<sup>10</sup> which reiterates your policies and the need for coordination of these matters.

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<sup>10</sup> The letter was attached at Tab A, but there was no indication that Nixon signed it; see Document 154.

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### 153. Memorandum of Conversation<sup>1</sup>

Washington, December 1, 1969, 11:30 a.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Sir Robert Thompson  
Desmond Palmer  
Dr. Kissinger  
Dr. Larry Lynn  
John Holdridge

SUBJECT

Sir Robert Thompson's Report on Conditions in Vietnam<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Kissinger stated that before going on to discuss Sir Robert Thompson's report, procedures needed to be established. He asked Sir

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 92, Vietnam Subject Files, Sir Robert Thompson, 1970. Secret; Nodis. Drafted by Holdridge with Lynn's concurrence. In a December 8 covering memorandum to Kissinger, Holdridge wrote: "Following this session, I asked Sir Robert to elaborate on one point which I thought he had been trying to make but which may not have come through too clearly: was he in effect saying that the GVN civil administration had not moved in behind the security forces to a sufficient degree, and that more attention needed to be directed to this problem? He agreed that this was what he had meant to convey." Kissinger approved White House distribution only and wrote, "Excellent memcon! HK. Note editing page 1" on Holdridge's December 8 memorandum. See footnote 3 below for the editing changes.

<sup>2</sup> Summarized in Document 158. The report, December 3, is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 92, Vietnam Subject Files, Sir Robert Thompson, 1970.

Robert not to offer anything to a wide audience until he, Dr. Kissinger, had a chance to see Sir Robert's report and the President had had a chance to consider it.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Kissinger mentioned that a special study group was meeting in the afternoon for the purpose of determining the situation in the provinces,<sup>4</sup> and to reach a factual basis for our moves in Vietnam. Sir Robert was to address this group. There never before had been a government consensus on what was actually happening, and we were trying now to reach such a consensus—perhaps five years too late. He then asked Sir Robert to give his conclusions.

Sir Robert declared that the situation had clearly improved, and was better than he had expected, both in terms of the HES statistics (which he did not necessarily accept) and in terms of extensive government control of the countryside. The VC were very much weaker, due to some extent to the strong government position which had evolved. In addition, he said, the people had made the decision that the VC were weaker than the GVN, and wouldn't win. It was for these reasons that the government had been able to spread out with the speed which had been displayed. Sir Robert mentioned situations in which villages which earlier had consisted of 3 or 400 people had expanded considerably due to the return of refugees; even former inhabitants of urban areas had flocked back.

Dr. Kissinger asked whether the improved situation was due in large part to the activities of the American forces or whether the VC were simply lying low. Sir Robert replied that the VC were not deliberately lying low but had been displaced into the forests and foothills. He had accepted, however, that the VC had not yet been seriously damaged, and were still there.

Dr. Kissinger asked if the Vietnamese were sensitive about American troop withdrawals, and if so, in what ways. Sir Robert said in response that the sensitivities were psychological. With the US forces as a shield, the government had been able to recruit without difficulty and had acquired a manpower base in the provinces which the VC currently lacked. (VC strength remained the same, but the VC have had recruiting difficulties.) His implication was that this balance might be disturbed without the US shield.

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<sup>3</sup> Kissinger requested a change in this sentence. It originally read: "He felt it was important to segregate what Sir Robert would give to the bureaucracy from what he would say to the President, and asked Sir Robert not to offer anything to a wide audience until he, Dr. Kissinger, had a chance to see Sir Robert's report."

<sup>4</sup> Brief minutes of the Vietnam Special Studies Group meeting on December 1, attended by Kissinger, Helms, Packard, and Richardson are in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-001, Vietnam Special Studies Group Meetings, 12/1/69.

Dr. Kissinger asked if the South Vietnamese could eventually take over from the US forces. Sir Robert expressed the opinion that at first it would be necessary to reach a position in which VC strength would become marginal throughout the South and the North Vietnamese troops were put in a position of being strictly an invasion force. When asked by Dr. Kissinger if this goal was in sight, Sir Robert said that two more years would be required, and that he looked to the elections in the fall of 1971 as being the crucial period.

Elaborating, Sir Robert said that the 1971 elections would be a dangerous time, and that the future of South Vietnam might hang on the outcome. The greatest danger was that if things had gone well prior to the elections, a peace campaign might develop. The people might want to see an end to the wartime difficulties and might respond to a peace campaign behind which the NLF would certainly throw all its strength. There might be as many as a dozen candidates, thus confusing the issues.

Dr. Kissinger inquired whether Sir Robert had raised this possibility with Thieu, to which Sir Robert mentioned that he had done so, but without any particular response. He had also mentioned these thoughts to Kiem and to Ambassador Bunker. Continuing, he speculated that if Thieu won in 1971 and continued his present policies, the North Vietnamese would indeed be put in a position where the only alternative to defeat was invasion. The North Vietnamese perhaps would contemplate invasion before accepting a negotiated settlement, in which they in any case did not believe. For this reason, he said, it was necessary for the US as it withdrew to leave residual forces.

Dr. Kissinger asked how many US troops should be left. Sir Robert suggested a number something like that in South Vietnam. When Dr. Kissinger queried whether a figure of 50,000, as in South Korea, would suffice, Sir Robert replied that he would not go as low as 50,000 and observed that the residual forces would need to be overweighted on the support side with some combat elements.

Dr. Kissinger raised the question of whether our withdrawals up until now had affected the general situation in Vietnam. Sir Robert replied in the negative, noting that even in the Delta there was as yet no cause for worry. The ARVN seemed to have the U Minh forest region well in hand, and he thought that the greatest threat in the Delta was in Chau Doc and the Seven Mountains area. He noted that the Communists were trying to reestablish the VC presence in the Delta but were having difficulties. For instance, the regiment that went into the U Minh area had been hard hit, and it was not easy for the forces operating well out of their old base areas to sustain themselves. For one thing, it was hard for them to get ammunition through, even in the area right across from Kien Hoa, which was a VC stronghold.

Dr. Kissinger asked Sir Robert for his impressions as to why the change for the better in Vietnam had taken place. Sir Robert singled out Hue as having been a critical factor. The VC attacks in Hue and the massacre of its people in the Tet offensive had given a much greater sense of mobilization to the Vietnamese people in general—a sense that they were really fighting a war. He noted in passing that the recovery of Hue and the surrounding countryside since the Tet attack had been “quite staggering”.

Dr. Kissinger asked Sir Robert for his views on the effects that a cease-fire might have on Vietnam developments, to which Sir Robert replied that a cease-fire would be “fairly disastrous”. He gave three reasons for this judgment:

- (1) A cease-fire would take the whole momentum out of the GVN program and give the VC a chance to recover;
- (2) The South Vietnamese people would regard a cease-fire as a loss of US resolve;
- (3) A cease-fire could not be verified, and TV cameras would focus on GVN violations while not touching on violations of the other side. Dr. Kissinger commented on this last point that there were a lot of volunteers in the US who would get in line to beat up Thieu, led by Averill Harriman.

Dr. Kissinger asked Sir Robert for an assessment of how the ARVN was doing. Sir Robert observed that he had not seen too much of the ARVN but had been very impressed with the First Division in I Corps. He had met the commanders of two regiments and was sure that they would fight. He pointed out this was a big division with 17 battalions.

Dr. Kissinger asked Sir Robert for a judgment on what he would do if he were laying out Hanoi’s policies. Sir Robert’s concept of Hanoi’s best course was to keep its attacks focussed on Vietnamization to the exclusion of other objectives. If Hanoi were to act in this way, it would thereby pose the greatest dangers for our side apart from the peace movement. Hanoi’s objective in attacking Vietnamization would be to force a US withdrawal, to compel the Vietnamese to put all their effort into building up its military forces, including the RF and PF, and in effect to prevent the GVN from building up any presence except for armed forces in the rural areas, where it was weakest. The Communists could accomplish this purpose by keeping up the strength of their own forces and mounting small-scale attacks. It was important, he explained, to provide security to the villages, but the people in the villages want more than security. They want improvements in the social and economic fields. Mr. Palmer expressed agreement.

Sir Robert went on to speculate, however, that in the next two years there probably would be a tendency on the part of the Communists to diffuse their efforts. While they should concentrate on Vietnamization, they would probably be unable to resist taking on other targets—the

US forces, the ARVN, pacification—and spread themselves thin. If so, they would not be able to make a real dent in the general situation. Dr. Kissinger expressed keen interest in Sir Robert's analysis of the likelihood of enemy miscalculation and diffusion of effort.

Dr. Kissinger raised the subject of enemy infiltration, to which Sir Robert commented that the strength of the Communist units had diminished, and the infiltration which was presently occurring might be necessary simply to build up combat levels. He remarked that the standards of the infiltrators coming in were well down—the new arrivals were not the cream of the North Vietnamese armed forces. Sir Robert surmised from this that the North Vietnamese did not have much left in the way of manpower resources.

Dr. Kissinger referred to the favorable developments which had occurred, and asked Sir Robert whether we could have won the war if we had not decided to withdraw. Sir Robert's response was that in the end the Vietnamese must win the war, and doubted the value of more troops since most Communist forces were out of the country and could not be effectively reached. He noted, though, that new infiltration trails were being built in South Vietnam, and referred to COSVN Resolution 9 on the Communists' determination to improve their logistics. Dr. Kissinger observed that he had been shown photographs of these trails, and wondered why they were not being mined. Sir Robert stated that we were up against a very soft target between the mountains and the coast. The enemy had to rely on porters, and his battalions were strung out thinly along the trails. In particular, the enemy was dependent on outside ammunition and now had much less in-country support. It was his opinion that if infiltration continues to go up, the enemy would try something more. He might attempt to get a sustained attack going—a "mini-Tet"—probably against two or three targets, but not sustained throughout the country. Sir Robert looked to the March-May period next year for such an effort.

Dr. Lynn noted that looking at the situation in the various provinces there were great differences among them but GVN control seemed to be going up. He contrasted the situation in Thua Thien, where enemy main forces had pulled out but where strong local forces were still present, with the Delta, where there were no main forces and local forces were not strong; in each area GVN control was increasing. What were we doing right that we could reproduce elsewhere? Were there any indications as to where we should put our emphasis?

Sir Robert thought that our emphasis largely should be on economy of forces. We needed to concentrate in areas where the VC were most powerful, such as north and south of Danang, MR 5, and the Delta. He singled out Dinh Tuong and Long An as being particular trouble spots, saying that what went on in one affected the other, and



both in turn were affected by developments in Kien Hoa. Nevertheless, security was improving in these provinces and he mentioned having driven along the roads in Long An in a party of three jeeps, not one of which was armed. He reported also that roads were open to many district capitals.

Dr. Lynn asked for an assessment of whether this change in the enemy's situation had been achieved due to our initiative and the relative ability of the GVN forces to keep the roads open with US help, or to a change in enemy strategy. Sir Robert attributed the change to the enemy's inability to sustain his efforts. He could mine the roads but the roads were being repaired. Dr. Lynn asked if what he was saying meant that we had won the war militarily. Sir Robert said he would not like to divide the military aspects from the other aspects; thus we had not won the war, and the situation was still fragile. If the VC recovered, or there was a loss of popular confidence in the US, circumstances could change.

Dr. Lynn queried Sir Robert on the causes for erosion of the VC underground in the villages—was this due to lack of support from the main forces, or to what our side had accomplished in routing out the infrastructure, or both? Sir Robert did not give a firm answer but simply pointed out that the infrastructure generally lacks military support and its erosion added to the enemy's problems. Sir Robert cited the massive Chieu Hoi figures, noting that these meant the loss of lower grade manpower and basic enemy strength. He pointed out that this did not mean there were no VC committee members at the village-district-province level. Some of these leaders were able to go through the system and acquire new identities.

Dr. Lynn asked what we should do to maximize the chances of stabilizing the gains which had been made. Sir Robert replied that the answer lay in the psychological and not the military field, and that military developments were cued to psychological ones. Asked if we had been helped psychologically by our withdrawals, Sir Robert replied that to some extent we had been helped. Once the people had gotten used to the concept of withdrawals, and found they could carry on by themselves, there had been increased confidence. Nevertheless, people still wanted the US around. Sir Robert cited Bu Prang as an excellent way to play the game—to keep US forces out, and lay the burden of the fighting on the Vietnamese.

Dr. Kissinger summarized Sir Robert's comments as saying in effect that North Vietnam no longer has the capability of winning, and that while progress would be slow it could not be reversed. For example, if the enemy were to put all his effort into defeating Vietnamization, then pacification would improve. Sir Robert agreed, and reiterated the point he had made earlier that the other side would make

mistakes. It was a matter of opportunity: if they saw the possibility of taking on another target besides Vietnamization, they would do so.

Dr. Lynn remarked that some people were worried over the extent to which progress in the countryside actually represented accommodation. How could we know? Sir Robert said that there was less accommodation now than in the past, and this could be seen in the district towns. He did not elaborate. Mr. Palmer added that there was a time factor involved—when peasants returned to the rice paddies after a district was opened up, the RF/PF then moved in. There was more terrorism in the Delta than in other areas but elsewhere it was less easy to maintain a threat. He mentioned, too, that the province chiefs were good. Sir Robert endorsed Mr. Palmer's comment, saying that the province chiefs throughout the country "were the best yet."

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#### 154. National Security Decision Memorandum 36<sup>1</sup>

Washington, December 3, 1969.

TO

The Secretary of State  
The Secretary of Defense

SUBJECT

Holiday Truces, Cease-fire and Troop Withdrawals

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-213, NSDM Files, NSDM 36. Top Secret; Sensitive. Attached to this memorandum is a 42-page draft paper, January 15, 1970, entitled "An Agreed General Cease-Fire in Vietnam," prepared by the Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam and transmitted to the Chairman of the NSC Review Group by Sullivan. The paper discusses the major issues involved in an agreed general cease-fire, focusing on the conditions the United States should insist be met in order for it to accept such a cease-fire. The paper also identifies various options and identifies those that represent the minimum condition acceptable to each agency on the Ad Hoc Group. The President met with Rogers and Laird and apparently Mitchell (although he is not listed as a participant) on December 1 from 4:50 to 6:30 p.m. (President's Daily Diary, December 1; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files) Prior to the meeting, Kissinger called Laird on the telephone and asked him "to take a strong line" at the meeting opposing coupling the holiday cease-fire and a permanent cease-fire. Kissinger also called Mitchell and asked him at the President's request "to come out against" the "power play by State to ram their permanent ceasefire through." (Notes of telephone conversations, December 1, 3:15 and 3:22 p.m.; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 361, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File) No other record of the meeting has been found.

In response to the Secretary of State's memorandum of November 28, 1969<sup>2</sup> and subsequent discussions with you, the President has made the following decisions with respect to holiday truces, cease-fire and troop withdrawals:

1. He wishes to avoid speculation that the U.S. Government is considering new proposals regarding a permanent negotiated cease-fire in South Vietnam and he does not want the issue of brief holiday truces linked with initiatives for a permanent negotiated cease-fire.

2. The President has approved the announcement of a 24-hour truce for Christmas and a 24-hour truce for New Years, with the announcement to be made in Saigon in coordination with the GVN.

3. Until the receipt of specific guidance to the contrary, there is to be no departmental speculation or comment whatsoever to the press on the subject of further troop withdrawals from Vietnam.

The decision regarding a permanent negotiated cease-fire should not preclude continuation of the studies under way on this subject which are designed to formulate the U.S. position and the conditions which we should insist be met if a cease-fire were to be proposed by the other side. It is contemplated, however, that the results of these studies, to include the views of the GVN, will be forwarded through the National Security Council framework for formal consideration by the NSC before discussions of any type would be undertaken with Hanoi's representatives in Paris or elsewhere.

**Henry A. Kissinger**

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<sup>2</sup> In this memorandum to Nixon, Rogers sought the President's urgent decision on U.S. policy regarding the traditional observance of the Christmas and New Year holidays in Vietnam. Rogers' recommendation was to endorse a truce from Christmas Day through New Year's Day, although he was willing to accept two separate truces—48 hours at Christmas, and 24 hours at New Year's. Rogers also stated that the United States ought to offer to begin negotiations on a longstanding cease-fire rather than merely restate its willingness to do so, and to make this offer at the same time as the announcement of the holiday truce. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 27–14 VIET) At Kissinger's request Laird sent these views to Kissinger on November 28. Laird wrote that "under no circumstances should [the United States] extend holiday truces beyond the proposed 24-hour period," and they should "be kept completely separate from that of a negotiated permanent cease-fire." Laird also recommended the United States announce in Paris its readiness to begin immediate negotiations toward a formal agreement on a permanent cease-fire based on the eight points listed in Nixon's May 14 speech. Lastly, Laird believed that "simultaneous proposals for holiday truces and for opening negotiations on a permanent cease-fire might short-circuit pressure to extend the truces and at the same time give us a psychological advantage—both domestically and internationally." (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 66, Vietnam Subject Files, 2–D–A General Abrams Nov. II, Cease-fire, Vol. I, 1969)

**155. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, December 6, 1969.

## SUBJECT

My Lai Atrocities

At Tab A is a memorandum from Bryce Harlow through me to you conveying information on a proposal made by Senators Stennis and Margaret Chase Smith.<sup>2</sup> The proposal would ask you to constitute a Presidential commission to assemble all the facts of the My Lai incident. While the suggestion was apparently made in an effort to be helpful and to deflect other Congressional activity, I am not convinced that it would accomplish its purpose. Rather, I suspect it would tend to prolong public interest in the incident which has hopefully already reached its peak. As you know, there is some evidence that public pressures are now building which could discourage further press speculation on the incident.

If you were to establish a Presidential commission at a time when court martial proceedings are already underway, it would be difficult to see how meaningful testimony could be assembled without some conflict with the juridical proceedings and perhaps<sup>3</sup> claims by the defense counsels that the Executive Branch had instituted duplicatory proceedings which jeopardized the rights of their clients. The establishment of a commission might also be interpreted as a lack of confidence by you in the military's ability to police its problem and thereby contribute to suspicions that we are dealing with an even more fundamental breakdown in military standards and discipline. Furthermore, once the commission report is publicized a new rash of controversy could develop over its findings no matter what they might turn out to be. Conversely,

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 334, Subject Files, Items to Discuss with the President, 8/31/69–12/30/69. Secret; Sensitive. A handwritten notation by Kissinger reads, "Let's get list of names for commission"; a handwritten notation by Nixon reads, "To K." On November 21 Kissinger and Laird discussed the Mai Lai atrocity. (Notes of a telephone conversation, November 21, 3:50 p.m.; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

<sup>2</sup> Dated December 3, attached but not printed. In this memorandum, Harlow informed Kissinger that he had discussed the proposition of a commission with Haig and David Packard and they both thought "poorly of the idea, principally on the grounds that the Commission's report would extend the atrocity story into the future."

<sup>3</sup> Nixon underlined the rest of this sentence beginning with "claims"; he also underlined the last half of the following sentence.

the legal proceedings now underway would more than likely result in severe punishment that would have a conclusive character which would tend to limit public speculation. The court martial also tends to reinforce the isolated character of the incident.

Notwithstanding, there is a trend which may build in the wake of the My Lai incident which might further influence your judgment on how to proceed.

If other incidents continue to crop-up because My Lai has resurrected real or imagined recollections of atrocities by other veterans, then you will no longer be dealing with a single phenomenon. Should this situation develop, then I believe you should convene a commission since we will be dealing with an even more fundamental problem for which a military court would not be appropriate.

Finally, it is possible that regardless of your decision, the Congress might proceed on its own and confront you with a resolution calling for a Presidential commission to investigate My Lai. In this event, it might be propitious to preempt them by promptly appointing a commission of your choice.

*Recommendation:*<sup>4</sup>

1. That you not appoint a commission to assemble facts on My Lai until we have had an opportunity to assess the phenomena a little longer.
2. That if the Congress moves on its own or if additional atrocities appear to be surfacing, you proceed with the appointment of a commission.
3. That a contingency plan be prepared now which will enable you to move promptly in the event you decide to appoint a commission.

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<sup>4</sup> Nixon initialed the approve option. In a December 8 memorandum to the President, Kissinger responded to Nixon's request to suggestions from Moynihan that the President empanel a group of "wise men" to judge what went wrong at My Lai and declare a national day of prayer for the victims. Kissinger responded: "For you to follow either of these suggestions would be tantamount to a Presidential declaration of the guilt of the accused, without benefit of trial. The last thing we want is defense counsel citing a Presidential statement or action when making a plea that the accused's right to a fair trial has been prejudiced." Although Kissinger thought it was a "close decision," he suggested as long as the atrocity was "confined to My Lai, there should be no commission. If another incident surfaces, then a commission was called for." Nixon wrote "I agree" at the end of that memorandum. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 287, Memoranda to the President, December 1969, I) Moynihan's memorandum to the President, November 25, is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 118, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam—Lt. Calley Case (Mai Lai Atrocity).

**156. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, December 9, 1969.

SUBJECT

Covert Operations to Undermine Enemy Morale in Vietnam

Recently you requested information about over-all U.S. programs designed to reduce morale in North Vietnam and among the Viet Cong, the adequacy of such programs and what might be done to improve them.<sup>2</sup>

For security reasons I have separated my response into two sections and attach hereto a summary of CIA-sponsored covert operations directed at undermining enemy morale in both North and South Vietnam and related activity targeted against the North Vietnamese in Laos.<sup>3</sup>

*[1 paragraph (4 lines of source text) not declassified]*

These are:

*[4 paragraphs (12 lines of source text) not declassified]*

Despite the formidable difficulty of measuring the effectiveness of covert operations in denied areas, there is tangible evidence that these efforts have had some impact on North Vietnamese and Viet Cong morale.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 960, Haig Chronological Files, December 9–16, 1969 [1 of 2]. Secret; Eyes Only. Sent for action.

<sup>2</sup> In a November 24 memorandum to Kissinger, Nixon wrote: "Are we doing everything we can with regard to trying to disrupt morale in North Vietnam and among the VC? On several of my visits to Vietnam people told me that there could be programs which would be effective in reducing morale in those areas. I know that CIA, of course, is a miserable flop in this field, but will you give me a report as to whether our program, if any, is adequate." (Ibid.)

<sup>3</sup> Reference is to an attached 4-page undated memorandum entitled "Covert Operations To Undermine Enemy Morale." In a December 15 memorandum to the President, Kissinger listed overt programs to reduce North Vietnamese and VC morale. Within South Vietnam these included: U.S. Mission-sponsored radio programs estimated to reach 70 percent of the population, a 1.3 million 2-page newspaper air dropped fortnightly over contested areas, special mass circulation of important documents such as Nixon's speech of November 3, the Chieu Hoi program, and U.S. Army psywar leaflet drops from B-52's in South Vietnam and Laos. The only psywar operation against North Vietnam was a radio service called the "Voice of Freedom," broadcast from Hue but unreliable in reaching Hanoi or the Red River Delta during the day. After discussions with his staff and people involved in these programs, Kissinger suggested that the programs in South Vietnam were adequate, but radio output to North Vietnam should be improved and leaflet drops on North Vietnam should be renewed. Nixon approved asking Defense and USIA for a formal assessment of psywar operations, especially against North Vietnam. (Ibid., Box 141, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. XIII-2, 11–31 December 1969)

On page 4 of the attached summary, CIA proposes that consideration be given to the following suggestions for strengthening the effort to undermine enemy morale:

A. Re-examination of the total allied broadcasting effort reaching the enemy in South Vietnam to determine if it is adequate. It is possible that some transmitter assets now being directed at North Vietnam should be reoriented to the enemy in South Vietnam.

B. Reintroduction of leaflets into North Vietnam using wind drift insertion from aircraft flying over international waters or third countries adjacent to North Vietnam.

C. Utilization of Viet Cong and North Vietnam Army ralliers within the South Vietnam psychological warfare organizations.

D. Intensification of efforts to improve thematic guidance and selective targeting through better utilization of intelligence.

*Recommendation:*

That you authorize me to explore further through the 303 Committee, and other channels as appropriate, the suggestions enumerated above for improvement of our efforts to erode enemy morale.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Nixon checked the approve option and wrote: "Step up this activity to the maximum extent possible." On December 11 Kissinger informed Frank Chapin that Nixon had approved this memorandum and instructed that the issue be placed on the 303 Committee agenda for consideration at an early date.

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## 157. Memorandum for the 303 Committee<sup>1</sup>

Washington, December 11, 1969.

SUBJECT

The Provincial Reconnaissance Unit Program in Vietnam

### 1. Introduction

The Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) Program was last presented to the 303 Committee for review and expansion on 10 April 1968.<sup>2</sup> This paper is being submitted in response to the recent Presi-

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, Subject Files, Vietnam, 1969–1970. Secret; Eyes Only.

<sup>2</sup> On April 10, 1968, the 303 Committee endorsed the PRU program and approved the expansion of manpower to 6,000 men; see *Foreign Relations, 1964–1968*, vol. VI, Document 143.

dential Directive requiring that all programs approved by the 303 Committee be reviewed annually.

A particularly significant element of this review will be to balance the results of the PRU program, and its anticipated effectiveness, against the potential for political embarrassment which it represents.

## *2. Summary*

A. The Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) Program in South Vietnam forms an investigative and paramilitary attack upon the covert communist apparatus in South Vietnam. PRU teams, currently totalling approximately 4,200 men, operate in 44 provinces of South Vietnam. PRU are based in their home areas and operate in teams of 15–20 men. They are presently advised and supported by 101 U.S. military advisors and seven CIA personnel. CIA funds the PRU and retains overall administrative control of the project for the U.S. Government.

B. PRU teams act upon intelligence leads produced by Vietnamese and American units in the Phoenix/Phung Hoang program. They also have their own intelligence gathering capability. PRU teams conduct operations aimed specifically at capturing known members of the covert communist apparatus (Viet Cong infrastructure). PRU teams also become involved in fire fights with Viet Cong (VC) units. During FY 1969, PRU operations resulted in the capture of 12,140 cadre and guerrillas and the killing of 6,112.

C. PRU teams are a significant part of the Phoenix/Phung Hoang program, which coordinates the overall American and South Vietnamese attack upon the covert communist apparatus. During August 1969, the Phoenix/Phung Hoang program in its entirety killed or captured 1,381 communist cadre. Of these, PRU units were responsible for killing or capturing 207. During the same month the Vietnamese Regional Forces, which totalled 253,600 men, killed or captured 428 communist cadre. These figures are believed to be typical of trends still in operation and attest to the comparative efficiency of the PRU operation.

D. American officials, from Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker on down, have firmly suggested the PRU program and have cited it as the most effective method yet developed to strike directly at the covert communist apparatus which lies within many South Vietnamese villages. This program has been coordinated with Ambassador Bunker and MACV Commander, General Abrams, in Saigon. Both fully endorse the need for the program, although both also recognize the political risks involved in American support of a police paramilitary organization which strikes hard at a seemingly civilian target. The program is also closely coordinated with and supported by the Government of South Vietnam (GVN). Prime Minister Kiem and Colonel



Hai, Director General of the National Police, are in favor of the program, which is now a part of the Directorate General of National Police under the Ministry of Interior.

[Omitted here is the Discussion section which reviews the history of the PRU program since its inception in April 1965, the tactics and methods of the PRU teams, funding arrangements, and the United States and GVN agreement in principle that the PRU would eventually be fully absorbed into South Vietnam's National Police Field Forces. Also omitted is an assessment of risks that states while the "emphasis" of the program was on capture of members of the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese infrastructure, "many PRU targets are killed" and the PRU have used "methods that are extreme by American standards." The potential for adverse publicity was high. The assessment then described efforts undertaken to minimize U.S. identification with the program.]

### 5. *Proposal*

A. It is proposed that CIA continue to provide financial support and operational guidance to the PRU program through FY 1971. Continuation of this support will have a two-fold purpose: first, to keep the PRU in being as a proven weapon against the covert communist apparatus, and second, to prepare the GVN for full assumption of responsibility for the PRU program by 1 July 1971.

B. Factors favoring this proposal include the following:

1. The present momentum and effectiveness of the PRU will be maintained at a time when the village-level communist apparatus appears to be losing both its effectiveness and appeal.

2. Continued refinement and improvement can be made in targeting and directing the PRU against their target. The PRU are a critical element of the Phoenix/Phung Hoang program, and their weakening or removal would damage the overall effort.

3. Vietnamization of PRU program can continue at an orderly pace, leading to absorption of the units by the GVN in a form judged most appropriate at the time.

4. PRU production of tactical intelligence information would continue to be made available to other GVN intelligence and police units operating at the district or province levels. (In the year period ending 1 October 1969, the PRU produced almost 25,000 tactical intelligence reports on Viet Cong activities.)

5. Continuation of U.S. support to the PRU would be interpreted by the GVN as a concrete indication of U.S. determination to proceed with the Vietnamization process on a planned and programmed basis.

C. Factors weighing against this proposal include the following:

1. Continued U.S. support of the PRU program risks adverse publicity either through an untoward incident, a press campaign to publicize its efforts or complaints from accommodation-minded South Vietnamese officials or politicians.<sup>3</sup>

2. CIA will have to continue its support to a program which lies, at least in part, outside its usual intelligence mission.

#### 6. *Alternatives*

A. The first of these would be to terminate U.S. support to the PRU with the end of FY 1970. Factors favoring this proposal include the following:

1. CIA would be relieved of the need to fund the PRU program for FY 1971.

2. CIA and MACV would be relieved of the need to commit their personnel to a program involving paramilitary units.

3. After 1 July 1970, the CIA and the U.S. could disclaim any direct responsibility for PRU operations which caused adverse public reactions.

4. The Vietnamese National Police Field Forces (NPF) would be augmented and strengthened by absorption of the PRU.

B. Factors weighing against this proposal include the following:

1. As of 1 July 1970, the PRU would cease to exist as an independent force committed to an attack on the covert communist apparatus. This would result in lowering both the intensity and effectiveness of the Phoenix/Phung Hoang program's attack.

2. PRU tactical intelligence output would be curtailed.

3. Cutting off support to PRU could be taken by the Vietnamese as an indication that Vietnamization of the war effort would be carried out in a precipitate manner by the U.S.

4. Individual PRU members or teams might well resent the quick termination of U.S. support, and resist piecemeal integration into the NPF. Adverse press play and political repercussions could result.

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<sup>3</sup> On December 15 Laird met with George A. Carver, Jr., the DCI's Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs. In a December 15 memorandum to Helms, Carver stated that Laird was anxious to remove all U.S. military personnel from the PRU program, as were Abrams and the JCS. Laird admitted that his concerns were "political," and he wanted to avoid a flap over the PRU in which U.S. military personnel would be associated. Carver explained that recent steps had been taken to tighten controls over the program, curtail the operational involvement of U.S. military personnel, and shift the emphasis to intelligence collection from ambush or "elimination." Carver argued that the sudden removal of U.S. military personnel, who were already in the process of being gradually reduced, would be a mistake and would jeopardize the program. Laird agreed to reconsider his view. (Central Intelligence Agency, Job 80-R01920R, Carver Files (SAVA-NIO), GAC Chrono, Sept-Dec 1969, #4)

C. A third course of action which can be considered is a complete turnover of the PRU program to General Abrams and MACV. This alternative has not been coordinated in Saigon, but might merit consideration if CIA support to the PRU is ruled out.

7. *Costs*

The PRU program is budgeted at [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] in FY 1970. The program has been reviewed by the BOB and budgeted at a level of [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] for FY 1971.

8. *Recommendation*

It is recommended that the 303 Committee approve CIA's continued support to the PRU program through FY 1971.

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**158. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, December 12, 1969.

SUBJECT

Sir Robert Thompson's Report

I attach Sir Robert's written report on his trip to Vietnam (Tab A).<sup>2</sup> Although you are familiar with many of the points made in it,<sup>3</sup> I have summarized the major points below.

—There has been great improvement in the military and political picture, and we have a winning position. We need continued applica-

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 92, Vietnam Subject Files, Sir Robert Thompson, 1970. Secret. Sent for action.

<sup>2</sup> Attached but not printed.

<sup>3</sup> In a December 2 briefing memorandum for the President in anticipation of his meeting with Thompson, Kissinger summarized Thompson's findings and suggested that Thompson produce a written report of his trip. Kissinger also suggested that Nixon ask for Thompson's views on Vietnamization, whether he believed the improvement in the GVN's position in the countryside was due mainly to improvements in security or whether there was growing political support as well, and to convey his appreciation for Thompson's time and effort. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 92, Vietnam Subject Files, Sir Robert Thompson 1970) Nixon and Thompson met at the White House on December 3, 5:38–6:52 p.m.; no other record of this meeting has been found. (President's Daily Diary, December 3; *ibid.*, White House Central Files)

tion of the “do it yourself” concept for the GVN and confidence in correctness of our policy.

—North Vietnamese army capability in SVN has been substantially reduced, but this could be remedied by a high level of infiltration.

—The VC military structure has been sadly hurt and should continue to weaken; the party political structure is still largely intact, however, and the VC still have the capability to recover if the pressure eases.

—Enemy activity will continue along present lines over the next few months, but the Communists may try a spectacular short offensive after March 1970.

—A long-range danger is a peace campaign backed by the Communists in the 1971 elections using someone like Dzu as the front man.

—It is also possible that the VC will recover in the countryside after 1971 and a large scale draw-down of U.S. forces and aid.

—Present U.S. strategy in SVN is correct. There should be more concentration on the key provinces, better organization of our resources, and more continuity in our policy, however.

—He does not presume to judge the rate at which we can withdraw our forces. This will depend on our periodic, over-all assessments of the situation.

*Recommendation:*

I recommend that we send copies of the report to the Secretaries of State and Defense and to the Director, CIA, asking for their comments and suggestions on dealing with the problem areas raised by Sir Robert.

This action would help assure that we get maximum value from his insight and suggestions.

If you approve, I will undertake to request comments from the concerned Departments.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Nixon initialed the approve option on December 20.

**159. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, December 13, 1969.

SUBJECT

North Vietnam's Reply to Our Overture for Private Meeting

Attached is the full text of the exchange General Walters had with My Van Bo in Paris Friday morning.

Upon reading the actual text of the exchange, it is apparent that the North Vietnamese reply had some interesting features:

—The tone, while tough, is much milder than anything we have heard since spring.

—Their suggestion that we should have something new to say is really equivalent to our request for something new from them. Thus, it could be considered in the context of face.

—The proposal they make mentions only withdrawal and does not link, as they have in the past, withdrawal with a coalition or a provisional government. For example, in the plenary session a week ago, they stated peace depends on dropping the Thieu-Ky regime and U.S. withdrawal. This may constitute a willingness to concentrate only on troop withdrawals in a "two-track approach" in which the South Vietnamese settle political issues among themselves. While the omission of the political track may be a come-on, this too is not without significance.

—The two concluding paragraphs (6 and 7) are especially conciliatory.

*Recommendation:*<sup>2</sup>

In view of the foregoing, I recommend:

1. We wait until after the next move in the Chicom Plan and until after we have talked to the Romanian emissary although his visit may not be linked specifically to the Vietnam problem.

2. In about two weeks, that we then send General Walters back to the North Vietnamese in Paris with the message that we consider a meeting would be useful under the assumption that both sides have

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 46, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Vietnam Peace Talks, 28 July 1969–27 February 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for action.

<sup>2</sup> Nixon initialed the approve option.

something new to say, and that under this assumption, we propose a meeting for a specific date in early January.

### Attachment

#### Telegram From the Senior Defense Attaché in France (Walters) to the Senior Military Assistant (Haig)<sup>3</sup>

Paris, December 12, 1969, 1330Z.

1. On 11 December at about 1900 local time I received call that MVB<sup>4</sup> wished to see me at Noon on 12 December. I went to house in Choisy today at that time and saw him alone. He asked after usual amenities whether I had remained in France since I last saw him and I said that I had. He then said he would read to me the reply of Government of DRVN but could not give me copy. He then gave me pen and paper and read at dictation speed in French emphasizing punctuation following message which I translated as I wrote into English checking with him any ambiguous points to clear up exact meaning. This English translation is therefore exact translation of what he read to me in French.

2. "We have on many occasions declared that in order to settle problems relating to South Vietnam the United States must engage in direct conversations with the provisional Revolutionary Government of Republic of Vietnam.

3. In the meantime however, and inasmuch as the U.S. had proposed private meetings with the Government of DRVN we were disposed their Delegate; this is what we did. Recently in his replies to press,<sup>5</sup> Minister Xuan Thuy made clear that if the U.S. had something new to propose and that Delegate (HAK) would desire another meeting, then we would be ready to meet him. This clearly denotes our serious attitude and shows our good will as well as our hope that these meetings would lead to a correct solution of the Vietnamese problem. However, the statements of Mr. Nixon at his press conference on 8 December 1969, and those made these last few days by Mr. Rogers and

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<sup>3</sup> Secret; Personally Eyes Only for General Haig. The copy printed here was retyped for the President.

<sup>4</sup> Mai Van Bo.

<sup>5</sup> Nixon underlined the phrase "recently in his replies to the press" and wrote the following comments on the left margin: "K—This may mean his press statement was directed to you."

Mr. Laird,<sup>6</sup> prove that the U.S. still hold to their position defined in the warlike speech of three November 1969 by Mr. Nixon.<sup>7</sup> Mr. Nixon has further in practice reduced the level of the Paris conference on Vietnam and demanded a reward<sup>8</sup> for the designation of a replacement for Mr. Cabot Lodge. At the same time he rejected outright the following proposal which was both logical and reasonable made by the PRG. 'If the United States declares that they will totally and unconditionally withdraw their troops and those of foreign countries who belong to the American camp from South Vietnam<sup>9</sup> in a period of six months, the parties will enter into the discussions concerning the calendar for the withdrawal of U.S. troops and those of foreign countries who are part of the U.S. camp, and on the problem of security guarantees relating to this withdrawal.'

4. Thus it is clear that on one hand the U.S. demands a reward for the designation of a replacement for Mr. Cabot Lodge and on the other hand they refuse to examine seriously the proposals of the opposing side, limiting themselves to demanding that we accept their conditions. The attitude of President Nixon and other members of U.S. Government proves that U.S. still seeking a military victory and that they do not yet want to achieve a correct solution for the Vietnamese problem by means of negotiations.

5. We therefore feel that any private meeting between Minister Xuan Thuy and Conselor HAK, as proposed by the latter could not be of any use. However when circumstances become favorable, when American side will really have something new to propose the two parties may then meet.

6. Insofar as we are concerned we will continue to maintain our serious attitude and good will. For their part the U.S. must also adopt a serious attitude and show good will. It is thus that we can achieve a settlement of the problem."

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<sup>6</sup> Nixon's comments at his December 8 news conference are in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1969*, pp. 1003–1013. The reference to Rogers' comments are apparently to remarks made during an interview by National Educational Television for broadcast on November 26. (Department of State *Bulletin*, December 22, 1969, pp. 577–583) Laird's remarks have not been identified.

<sup>7</sup> Nixon underlined "warlike speech" and put an exclamation point in the margin; see Document 144.

<sup>8</sup> Nixon underlined the phrase "demanded a reward" and put a question mark in the margin.

<sup>9</sup> Nixon wrote the following note at the bottom of the page: "shows they watch every statement we make—carefully" and drew an arrow to the phrase "from South Vietnam."

7. Upon conclusion he looked expectantly at me but I told him without expression that I would convey this message. On this occasion for first time he offered me tea which I accepted.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> At the bottom of this page, Nixon wrote the comments: "K—It still seems to me he expects *us* to offer something new & does not expect to offer anything on his part."

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## 160. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, December 16, 1969.

### SUBJECT

Future of the Paris Talks

You have asked Secretary of State Rogers for an opinion on whether the Paris talks are in the best interests of the United States. His reply (Tab A)<sup>2</sup> deals with the question in terms of alternatives:

—If the only alternative is the total suspension of the meetings on the grounds that they have degenerated into a propaganda forum, we would lose more than we gain by appearing to contradict our statement that we will persist through any means to seek a negotiated settlement.

—However, elimination or reduction of the present plenaries in favor of restricted sessions would be a "positive step" and would probably be received well at home and abroad.

Picking up the second alternative, the Secretary points out that the other side is very sensitive to the prospect that we might downgrade or even eliminate the negotiations, and suggests that we exploit this sensitivity in order to work toward restricted sessions. He suggests that

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 64, Memoranda to the President, 1969 December. Top Secret; Nodis; Paris Meetings. Drafted by Holdridge on December 16. Sent for information/action. There is no date on the memorandum; the date used is the drafting date.

<sup>2</sup> Tab A, a memorandum from Rogers to Nixon, December 15; attached but not printed. The Department of State copy of this memorandum indicated it was drafted by Sullivan and Eliot. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 27–14 VIET)



In response to the Secretary of State's memorandum of November 28, 1969<sup>2</sup> and subsequent discussions with you, the President has made the following decisions with respect to holiday truces, cease-fire and troop withdrawals:

1. He wishes to avoid speculation that the U.S. Government is considering new proposals regarding a permanent negotiated cease-fire in South Vietnam and he does not want the issue of brief holiday truces linked with initiatives for a permanent negotiated cease-fire.

2. The President has approved the announcement of a 24-hour truce for Christmas and a 24-hour truce for New Years, with the announcement to be made in Saigon in coordination with the GVN.

3. Until the receipt of specific guidance to the contrary, there is to be no departmental speculation or comment whatsoever to the press on the subject of further troop withdrawals from Vietnam.

The decision regarding a permanent negotiated cease-fire should not preclude continuation of the studies under way on this subject which are designed to formulate the U.S. position and the conditions which we should insist be met if a cease-fire were to be proposed by the other side. It is contemplated, however, that the results of these studies, to include the views of the GVN, will be forwarded through the National Security Council framework for formal consideration by the NSC before discussions of any type would be undertaken with Hanoi's representatives in Paris or elsewhere.

**Henry A. Kissinger**

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<sup>2</sup> In this memorandum to Nixon, Rogers sought the President's urgent decision on U.S. policy regarding the traditional observance of the Christmas and New Year holidays in Vietnam. Rogers' recommendation was to endorse a truce from Christmas Day through New Year's Day, although he was willing to accept two separate truces—48 hours at Christmas, and 24 hours at New Year's. Rogers also stated that the United States ought to offer to begin negotiations on a longstanding cease-fire rather than merely restate its willingness to do so, and to make this offer at the same time as the announcement of the holiday truce. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 27–14 VIET) At Kissinger's request Laird sent these views to Kissinger on November 28. Laird wrote that "under no circumstances should [the United States] extend holiday truces beyond the proposed 24-hour period," and they should "be kept completely separate from that of a negotiated permanent cease-fire." Laird also recommended the United States announce in Paris its readiness to begin immediate negotiations toward a formal agreement on a permanent cease-fire based on the eight points listed in Nixon's May 14 speech. Lastly, Laird believed that "simultaneous proposals for holiday truces and for opening negotiations on a permanent cease-fire might short-circuit pressure to extend the truces and at the same time give us a psychological advantage—both domestically and internationally." (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 66, Vietnam Subject Files, 2–D–A General Abrams Nov. II, Cease-fire, Vol. I, 1969)

**155. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, December 6, 1969.

## SUBJECT

My Lai Atrocities

At Tab A is a memorandum from Bryce Harlow through me to you conveying information on a proposal made by Senators Stennis and Margaret Chase Smith.<sup>2</sup> The proposal would ask you to constitute a Presidential commission to assemble all the facts of the My Lai incident. While the suggestion was apparently made in an effort to be helpful and to deflect other Congressional activity, I am not convinced that it would accomplish its purpose. Rather, I suspect it would tend to prolong public interest in the incident which has hopefully already reached its peak. As you know, there is some evidence that public pressures are now building which could discourage further press speculation on the incident.

If you were to establish a Presidential commission at a time when court martial proceedings are already underway, it would be difficult to see how meaningful testimony could be assembled without some conflict with the juridical proceedings and perhaps<sup>3</sup> claims by the defense counsels that the Executive Branch had instituted duplicatory proceedings which jeopardized the rights of their clients. The establishment of a commission might also be interpreted as a lack of confidence by you in the military's ability to police its problem and thereby contribute to suspicions that we are dealing with an even more fundamental breakdown in military standards and discipline. Furthermore, once the commission report is publicized a new rash of controversy could develop over its findings no matter what they might turn out to be. Conversely,

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 334, Subject Files, Items to Discuss with the President, 8/31/69–12/30/69. Secret; Sensitive. A handwritten notation by Kissinger reads, "Let's get list of names for commission"; a handwritten notation by Nixon reads, "To K." On November 21 Kissinger and Laird discussed the Mai Lai atrocity. (Notes of a telephone conversation, November 21, 3:50 p.m.; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

<sup>2</sup> Dated December 3, attached but not printed. In this memorandum, Harlow informed Kissinger that he had discussed the proposition of a commission with Haig and David Packard and they both thought "poorly of the idea, principally on the grounds that the Commission's report would extend the atrocity story into the future."

<sup>3</sup> Nixon underlined the rest of this sentence beginning with "claims"; he also underlined the last half of the following sentence.

the legal proceedings now underway would more than likely result in severe punishment that would have a conclusive character which would tend to limit public speculation. The court martial also tends to reinforce the isolated character of the incident.

Notwithstanding, there is a trend which may build in the wake of the My Lai incident which might further influence your judgment on how to proceed.

If other incidents continue to crop-up because My Lai has resurrected real or imagined recollections of atrocities by other veterans, then you will no longer be dealing with a single phenomenon. Should this situation develop, then I believe you should convene a commission since we will be dealing with an even more fundamental problem for which a military court would not be appropriate.

Finally, it is possible that regardless of your decision, the Congress might proceed on its own and confront you with a resolution calling for a Presidential commission to investigate My Lai. In this event, it might be propitious to preempt them by promptly appointing a commission of your choice.

*Recommendation:*<sup>4</sup>

1. That you not appoint a commission to assemble facts on My Lai until we have had an opportunity to assess the phenomena a little longer.
2. That if the Congress moves on its own or if additional atrocities appear to be surfacing, you proceed with the appointment of a commission.
3. That a contingency plan be prepared now which will enable you to move promptly in the event you decide to appoint a commission.

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<sup>4</sup> Nixon initialed the approve option. In a December 8 memorandum to the President, Kissinger responded to Nixon's request to suggestions from Moynihan that the President empanel a group of "wise men" to judge what went wrong at My Lai and declare a national day of prayer for the victims. Kissinger responded: "For you to follow either of these suggestions would be tantamount to a Presidential declaration of the guilt of the accused, without benefit of trial. The last thing we want is defense counsel citing a Presidential statement or action when making a plea that the accused's right to a fair trial has been prejudiced." Although Kissinger thought it was a "close decision," he suggested as long as the atrocity was "confined to My Lai, there should be no commission. If another incident surfaces, then a commission was called for." Nixon wrote "I agree" at the end of that memorandum. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 287, Memoranda to the President, December 1969, I) Moynihan's memorandum to the President, November 25, is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 118, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam—Lt. Calley Case (Mai Lai Atrocity).

**156. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, December 9, 1969.

SUBJECT

Covert Operations to Undermine Enemy Morale in Vietnam

Recently you requested information about over-all U.S. programs designed to reduce morale in North Vietnam and among the Viet Cong, the adequacy of such programs and what might be done to improve them.<sup>2</sup>

For security reasons I have separated my response into two sections and attach hereto a summary of CIA-sponsored covert operations directed at undermining enemy morale in both North and South Vietnam and related activity targeted against the North Vietnamese in Laos.<sup>3</sup>

*[1 paragraph (4 lines of source text) not declassified]*

These are:

*[4 paragraphs (12 lines of source text) not declassified]*

Despite the formidable difficulty of measuring the effectiveness of covert operations in denied areas, there is tangible evidence that these efforts have had some impact on North Vietnamese and Viet Cong morale.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 960, Haig Chronological Files, December 9–16, 1969 [1 of 2]. Secret; Eyes Only. Sent for action.

<sup>2</sup> In a November 24 memorandum to Kissinger, Nixon wrote: "Are we doing everything we can with regard to trying to disrupt morale in North Vietnam and among the VC? On several of my visits to Vietnam people told me that there could be programs which would be effective in reducing morale in those areas. I know that CIA, of course, is a miserable flop in this field, but will you give me a report as to whether our program, if any, is adequate." (Ibid.)

<sup>3</sup> Reference is to an attached 4-page undated memorandum entitled "Covert Operations To Undermine Enemy Morale." In a December 15 memorandum to the President, Kissinger listed overt programs to reduce North Vietnamese and VC morale. Within South Vietnam these included: U.S. Mission-sponsored radio programs estimated to reach 70 percent of the population, a 1.3 million 2-page newspaper air dropped fortnightly over contested areas, special mass circulation of important documents such as Nixon's speech of November 3, the Chieu Hoi program, and U.S. Army psywar leaflet drops from B-52's in South Vietnam and Laos. The only psywar operation against North Vietnam was a radio service called the "Voice of Freedom," broadcast from Hue but unreliable in reaching Hanoi or the Red River Delta during the day. After discussions with his staff and people involved in these programs, Kissinger suggested that the programs in South Vietnam were adequate, but radio output to North Vietnam should be improved and leaflet drops on North Vietnam should be renewed. Nixon approved asking Defense and USIA for a formal assessment of psywar operations, especially against North Vietnam. (Ibid., Box 141, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. XIII-2, 11–31 December 1969)

On page 4 of the attached summary, CIA proposes that consideration be given to the following suggestions for strengthening the effort to undermine enemy morale:

A. Re-examination of the total allied broadcasting effort reaching the enemy in South Vietnam to determine if it is adequate. It is possible that some transmitter assets now being directed at North Vietnam should be reoriented to the enemy in South Vietnam.

B. Reintroduction of leaflets into North Vietnam using wind drift insertion from aircraft flying over international waters or third countries adjacent to North Vietnam.

C. Utilization of Viet Cong and North Vietnam Army ralliers within the South Vietnam psychological warfare organizations.

D. Intensification of efforts to improve thematic guidance and selective targeting through better utilization of intelligence.

*Recommendation:*

That you authorize me to explore further through the 303 Committee, and other channels as appropriate, the suggestions enumerated above for improvement of our efforts to erode enemy morale.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Nixon checked the approve option and wrote: "Step up this activity to the maximum extent possible." On December 11 Kissinger informed Frank Chapin that Nixon had approved this memorandum and instructed that the issue be placed on the 303 Committee agenda for consideration at an early date.

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## 157. Memorandum for the 303 Committee<sup>1</sup>

Washington, December 11, 1969.

SUBJECT

The Provincial Reconnaissance Unit Program in Vietnam

### 1. Introduction

The Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) Program was last presented to the 303 Committee for review and expansion on 10 April 1968.<sup>2</sup> This paper is being submitted in response to the recent Presi-

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, Subject Files, Vietnam, 1969–1970. Secret; Eyes Only.

<sup>2</sup> On April 10, 1968, the 303 Committee endorsed the PRU program and approved the expansion of manpower to 6,000 men; see *Foreign Relations, 1964–1968*, vol. VI, Document 143.

dential Directive requiring that all programs approved by the 303 Committee be reviewed annually.

A particularly significant element of this review will be to balance the results of the PRU program, and its anticipated effectiveness, against the potential for political embarrassment which it represents.

## *2. Summary*

A. The Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) Program in South Vietnam forms an investigative and paramilitary attack upon the covert communist apparatus in South Vietnam. PRU teams, currently totalling approximately 4,200 men, operate in 44 provinces of South Vietnam. PRU are based in their home areas and operate in teams of 15–20 men. They are presently advised and supported by 101 U.S. military advisors and seven CIA personnel. CIA funds the PRU and retains overall administrative control of the project for the U.S. Government.

B. PRU teams act upon intelligence leads produced by Vietnamese and American units in the Phoenix/Phung Hoang program. They also have their own intelligence gathering capability. PRU teams conduct operations aimed specifically at capturing known members of the covert communist apparatus (Viet Cong infrastructure). PRU teams also become involved in fire fights with Viet Cong (VC) units. During FY 1969, PRU operations resulted in the capture of 12,140 cadre and guerrillas and the killing of 6,112.

C. PRU teams are a significant part of the Phoenix/Phung Hoang program, which coordinates the overall American and South Vietnamese attack upon the covert communist apparatus. During August 1969, the Phoenix/Phung Hoang program in its entirety killed or captured 1,381 communist cadre. Of these, PRU units were responsible for killing or capturing 207. During the same month the Vietnamese Regional Forces, which totalled 253,600 men, killed or captured 428 communist cadre. These figures are believed to be typical of trends still in operation and attest to the comparative efficiency of the PRU operation.

D. American officials, from Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker on down, have firmly suggested the PRU program and have cited it as the most effective method yet developed to strike directly at the covert communist apparatus which lies within many South Vietnamese villages. This program has been coordinated with Ambassador Bunker and MACV Commander, General Abrams, in Saigon. Both fully endorse the need for the program, although both also recognize the political risks involved in American support of a police paramilitary organization which strikes hard at a seemingly civilian target. The program is also closely coordinated with and supported by the Government of South Vietnam (GVN). Prime Minister Khiem and Colonel

Hai, Director General of the National Police, are in favor of the program, which is now a part of the Directorate General of National Police under the Ministry of Interior.

[Omitted here is the Discussion section which reviews the history of the PRU program since its inception in April 1965, the tactics and methods of the PRU teams, funding arrangements, and the United States and GVN agreement in principle that the PRU would eventually be fully absorbed into South Vietnam's National Police Field Forces. Also omitted is an assessment of risks that states while the "emphasis" of the program was on capture of members of the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese infrastructure, "many PRU targets are killed" and the PRU have used "methods that are extreme by American standards." The potential for adverse publicity was high. The assessment then described efforts undertaken to minimize U.S. identification with the program.]

#### 5. *Proposal*

A. It is proposed that CIA continue to provide financial support and operational guidance to the PRU program through FY 1971. Continuation of this support will have a two-fold purpose: first, to keep the PRU in being as a proven weapon against the covert communist apparatus, and second, to prepare the GVN for full assumption of responsibility for the PRU program by 1 July 1971.

B. Factors favoring this proposal include the following:

1. The present momentum and effectiveness of the PRU will be maintained at a time when the village-level communist apparatus appears to be losing both its effectiveness and appeal.

2. Continued refinement and improvement can be made in targeting and directing the PRU against their target. The PRU are a critical element of the Phoenix/Phung Hoang program, and their weakening or removal would damage the overall effort.

3. Vietnamization of PRU program can continue at an orderly pace, leading to absorption of the units by the GVN in a form judged most appropriate at the time.

4. PRU production of tactical intelligence information would continue to be made available to other GVN intelligence and police units operating at the district or province levels. (In the year period ending 1 October 1969, the PRU produced almost 25,000 tactical intelligence reports on Viet Cong activities.)

5. Continuation of U.S. support to the PRU would be interpreted by the GVN as a concrete indication of U.S. determination to proceed with the Vietnamization process on a planned and programmed basis.

C. Factors weighing against this proposal include the following:

1. Continued U.S. support of the PRU program risks adverse publicity either through an untoward incident, a press campaign to publicize its efforts or complaints from accommodation-minded South Vietnamese officials or politicians.<sup>3</sup>

2. CIA will have to continue its support to a program which lies, at least in part, outside its usual intelligence mission.

#### 6. *Alternatives*

A. The first of these would be to terminate U.S. support to the PRU with the end of FY 1970. Factors favoring this proposal include the following:

1. CIA would be relieved of the need to fund the PRU program for FY 1971.

2. CIA and MACV would be relieved of the need to commit their personnel to a program involving paramilitary units.

3. After 1 July 1970, the CIA and the U.S. could disclaim any direct responsibility for PRU operations which caused adverse public reactions.

4. The Vietnamese National Police Field Forces (NPF) would be augmented and strengthened by absorption of the PRU.

B. Factors weighing against this proposal include the following:

1. As of 1 July 1970, the PRU would cease to exist as an independent force committed to an attack on the covert communist apparatus. This would result in lowering both the intensity and effectiveness of the Phoenix/Phung Hoang program's attack.

2. PRU tactical intelligence output would be curtailed.

3. Cutting off support to PRU could be taken by the Vietnamese as an indication that Vietnamization of the war effort would be carried out in a precipitate manner by the U.S.

4. Individual PRU members or teams might well resent the quick termination of U.S. support, and resist piecemeal integration into the NPF. Adverse press play and political repercussions could result.

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<sup>3</sup> On December 15 Laird met with George A. Carver, Jr., the DCI's Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs. In a December 15 memorandum to Helms, Carver stated that Laird was anxious to remove all U.S. military personnel from the PRU program, as were Abrams and the JCS. Laird admitted that his concerns were "political," and he wanted to avoid a flap over the PRU in which U.S. military personnel would be associated. Carver explained that recent steps had been taken to tighten controls over the program, curtail the operational involvement of U.S. military personnel, and shift the emphasis to intelligence collection from ambush or "elimination." Carver argued that the sudden removal of U.S. military personnel, who were already in the process of being gradually reduced, would be a mistake and would jeopardize the program. Laird agreed to reconsider his view. (Central Intelligence Agency, Job 80-R01920R, Carver Files (SAVA-NIO), GAC Chrono, Sept-Dec 1969, #4)



C. A third course of action which can be considered is a complete turnover of the PRU program to General Abrams and MACV. This alternative has not been coordinated in Saigon, but might merit consideration if CIA support to the PRU is ruled out.

7. *Costs*

The PRU program is budgeted at [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] in FY 1970. The program has been reviewed by the BOB and budgeted at a level of [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] for FY 1971.

8. *Recommendation*

It is recommended that the 303 Committee approve CIA's continued support to the PRU program through FY 1971.

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**158. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, December 12, 1969.

SUBJECT

Sir Robert Thompson's Report

I attach Sir Robert's written report on his trip to Vietnam (Tab A).<sup>2</sup> Although you are familiar with many of the points made in it,<sup>3</sup> I have summarized the major points below.

—There has been great improvement in the military and political picture, and we have a winning position. We need continued applica-

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 92, Vietnam Subject Files, Sir Robert Thompson, 1970. Secret. Sent for action.

<sup>2</sup> Attached but not printed.

<sup>3</sup> In a December 2 briefing memorandum for the President in anticipation of his meeting with Thompson, Kissinger summarized Thompson's findings and suggested that Thompson produce a written report of his trip. Kissinger also suggested that Nixon ask for Thompson's views on Vietnamization, whether he believed the improvement in the GVN's position in the countryside was due mainly to improvements in security or whether there was growing political support as well, and to convey his appreciation for Thompson's time and effort. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 92, Vietnam Subject Files, Sir Robert Thompson 1970) Nixon and Thompson met at the White House on December 3, 5:38–6:52 p.m.; no other record of this meeting has been found. (President's Daily Diary, December 3; *ibid.*, White House Central Files)

tion of the “do it yourself” concept for the GVN and confidence in correctness of our policy.

—North Vietnamese army capability in SVN has been substantially reduced, but this could be remedied by a high level of infiltration.

—The VC military structure has been sadly hurt and should continue to weaken; the party political structure is still largely intact, however, and the VC still have the capability to recover if the pressure eases.

—Enemy activity will continue along present lines over the next few months, but the Communists may try a spectacular short offensive after March 1970.

—A long-range danger is a peace campaign backed by the Communists in the 1971 elections using someone like Dzu as the front man.

—It is also possible that the VC will recover in the countryside after 1971 and a large scale draw-down of U.S. forces and aid.

—Present U.S. strategy in SVN is correct. There should be more concentration on the key provinces, better organization of our resources, and more continuity in our policy, however.

—He does not presume to judge the rate at which we can withdraw our forces. This will depend on our periodic, over-all assessments of the situation.

*Recommendation:*

I recommend that we send copies of the report to the Secretaries of State and Defense and to the Director, CIA, asking for their comments and suggestions on dealing with the problem areas raised by Sir Robert.

This action would help assure that we get maximum value from his insight and suggestions.

If you approve, I will undertake to request comments from the concerned Departments.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Nixon initialed the approve option on December 20.

**159. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, December 13, 1969.

SUBJECT

North Vietnam's Reply to Our Overture for Private Meeting

Attached is the full text of the exchange General Walters had with My Van Bo in Paris Friday morning.

Upon reading the actual text of the exchange, it is apparent that the North Vietnamese reply had some interesting features:

—The tone, while tough, is much milder than anything we have heard since spring.

—Their suggestion that we should have something new to say is really equivalent to our request for something new from them. Thus, it could be considered in the context of face.

—The proposal they make mentions only withdrawal and does not link, as they have in the past, withdrawal with a coalition or a provisional government. For example, in the plenary session a week ago, they stated peace depends on dropping the Thieu-Ky regime and U.S. withdrawal. This may constitute a willingness to concentrate only on troop withdrawals in a "two-track approach" in which the South Vietnamese settle political issues among themselves. While the omission of the political track may be a come-on, this too is not without significance.

—The two concluding paragraphs (6 and 7) are especially conciliatory.

*Recommendation:*<sup>2</sup>

In view of the foregoing, I recommend:

1. We wait until after the next move in the Chicom Plan and until after we have talked to the Romanian emissary although his visit may not be linked specifically to the Vietnam problem.

2. In about two weeks, that we then send General Walters back to the North Vietnamese in Paris with the message that we consider a meeting would be useful under the assumption that both sides have

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 46, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Vietnam Peace Talks, 28 July 1969–27 February 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for action.

<sup>2</sup> Nixon initialed the approve option.

something new to say, and that under this assumption, we propose a meeting for a specific date in early January.

### Attachment

#### Telegram From the Senior Defense Attaché in France (Walters) to the Senior Military Assistant (Haig)<sup>3</sup>

Paris, December 12, 1969, 1330Z.

1. On 11 December at about 1900 local time I received call that MVB<sup>4</sup> wished to see me at Noon on 12 December. I went to house in Choisy today at that time and saw him alone. He asked after usual amenities whether I had remained in France since I last saw him and I said that I had. He then said he would read to me the reply of Government of DRVN but could not give me copy. He then gave me pen and paper and read at dictation speed in French emphasizing punctuation following message which I translated as I wrote into English checking with him any ambiguous points to clear up exact meaning. This English translation is therefore exact translation of what he read to me in French.

2. "We have on many occasions declared that in order to settle problems relating to South Vietnam the United States must engage in direct conversations with the provisional Revolutionary Government of Republic of Vietnam.

3. In the meantime however, and inasmuch as the U.S. had proposed private meetings with the Government of DRVN we were disposed their Delegate; this is what we did. Recently in his replies to press,<sup>5</sup> Minister Xuan Thuy made clear that if the U.S. had something new to propose and that Delegate (HAK) would desire another meeting, then we would be ready to meet him. This clearly denotes our serious attitude and shows our good will as well as our hope that these meetings would lead to a correct solution of the Vietnamese problem. However, the statements of Mr. Nixon at his press conference on 8 December 1969, and those made these last few days by Mr. Rogers and

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<sup>3</sup> Secret; Personally Eyes Only for General Haig. The copy printed here was retyped for the President.

<sup>4</sup> Mai Van Bo.

<sup>5</sup> Nixon underlined the phrase "recently in his replies to the press" and wrote the following comments on the left margin: "K—This may mean his press statement was directed to you."

Mr. Laird,<sup>6</sup> prove that the U.S. still hold to their position defined in the warlike speech of three November 1969 by Mr. Nixon.<sup>7</sup> Mr. Nixon has further in practice reduced the level of the Paris conference on Vietnam and demanded a reward<sup>8</sup> for the designation of a replacement for Mr. Cabot Lodge. At the same time he rejected outright the following proposal which was both logical and reasonable made by the PRG. 'If the United States declares that they will totally and unconditionally withdraw their troops and those of foreign countries who belong to the American camp from South Vietnam<sup>9</sup> in a period of six months, the parties will enter into the discussions concerning the calendar for the withdrawal of U.S. troops and those of foreign countries who are part of the U.S. camp, and on the problem of security guarantees relating to this withdrawal.'

4. Thus it is clear that on one hand the U.S. demands a reward for the designation of a replacement for Mr. Cabot Lodge and on the other hand they refuse to examine seriously the proposals of the opposing side, limiting themselves to demanding that we accept their conditions. The attitude of President Nixon and other members of U.S. Government proves that U.S. still seeking a military victory and that they do not yet want to achieve a correct solution for the Vietnamese problem by means of negotiations.

5. We therefore feel that any private meeting between Minister Xuan Thuy and Conselor HAK, as proposed by the latter could not be of any use. However when circumstances become favorable, when American side will really have something new to propose the two parties may then meet.

6. Insofar as we are concerned we will continue to maintain our serious attitude and good will. For their part the U.S. must also adopt a serious attitude and show good will. It is thus that we can achieve a settlement of the problem."

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<sup>6</sup> Nixon's comments at his December 8 news conference are in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1969*, pp. 1003–1013. The reference to Rogers' comments are apparently to remarks made during an interview by National Educational Television for broadcast on November 26. (Department of State *Bulletin*, December 22, 1969, pp. 577–583) Laird's remarks have not been identified.

<sup>7</sup> Nixon underlined "warlike speech" and put an exclamation point in the margin; see Document 144.

<sup>8</sup> Nixon underlined the phrase "demanded a reward" and put a question mark in the margin.

<sup>9</sup> Nixon wrote the following note at the bottom of the page: "shows they watch every statement we make—carefully" and drew an arrow to the phrase "from South Vietnam."

7. Upon conclusion he looked expectantly at me but I told him without expression that I would convey this message. On this occasion for first time he offered me tea which I accepted.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> At the bottom of this page, Nixon wrote the comments: "K—It still seems to me he expects *us* to offer something new & does not expect to offer anything on his part."

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## 160. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, December 16, 1969.

### SUBJECT

Future of the Paris Talks

You have asked Secretary of State Rogers for an opinion on whether the Paris talks are in the best interests of the United States. His reply (Tab A)<sup>2</sup> deals with the question in terms of alternatives:

—If the only alternative is the total suspension of the meetings on the grounds that they have degenerated into a propaganda forum, we would lose more than we gain by appearing to contradict our statement that we will persist through any means to seek a negotiated settlement.

—However, elimination or reduction of the present plenaries in favor of restricted sessions would be a "positive step" and would probably be received well at home and abroad.

Picking up the second alternative, the Secretary points out that the other side is very sensitive to the prospect that we might downgrade or even eliminate the negotiations, and suggests that we exploit this sensitivity in order to work toward restricted sessions. He suggests that

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 64, Memoranda to the President, 1969 December. Top Secret; Nodis; Paris Meetings. Drafted by Holdridge on December 16. Sent for information/action. There is no date on the memorandum; the date used is the drafting date.

<sup>2</sup> Tab A, a memorandum from Rogers to Nixon, December 15; attached but not printed. The Department of State copy of this memorandum indicated it was drafted by Sullivan and Eliot. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 27–14 VIET)

we use the upcoming holiday season to test the possibilities by reducing the frequency of the talks as follows:

—Substituting one plenary meeting on December 30 for the two plenaries which normally would be held on December 25 and January 1, and proposing in the regularly-scheduled January 8 meeting that future meetings be plenary and restricted on alternate Thursdays.

The Secretary doubts that the other side would accept, and foresees three courses of action which we could then take:

—Insisting on our proposal and refusing to attend any meetings unless it is accepted. Total cessation of the talks would then be at our initiative.

—Agreeing to plenary sessions every other Thursday, with a hiatus in between unless the other side accepts alternate restricted and plenary sessions. If, as probable, they insist on weekly sessions or none at all, the onus for the resulting total cessation of the talks would be more on their side.

—Maintaining and continuing to put forward our proposal for alternating sessions, but attending regular weekly sessions in the meantime.

The Secretary recommends in sum that we hold only one plenary session during the holiday season, on December 30; that on January 8 we propose alternating plenary and restricted sessions; and that we continue to attend weekly plenaries if the other side rejects our proposal.

*Comment:* I agree with the Secretary on the liabilities which complete cessation of the talks would entail. I also agree on the utility of pushing toward restricted sessions. Secretary Rogers' gambit impresses me, therefore, as being worth trying. I doubt, however, that you would want to leave us tied into an indefinite series of plenary sessions of the type we have encountered so far, and suggest that you might wish again to review the course of the talks and possible alternatives with Secretary Rogers in about six weeks' time.

*Recommendation:*<sup>3</sup>

That you authorize me to inform Secretary Rogers of your agreement to his recommended course of action.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Both recommendations were approved for Nixon by Kissinger on December 18.

<sup>4</sup> Kissinger informed Rogers of Nixon's approval of his recommended course of action in a December 30 memorandum, and directed specifically that "Ambassador Habib should offer at the January 8 session alternating restricted and plenary sessions." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Box TS 64, Memoranda to the President, 1969 December)

That you authorize me to inform him that you will want another look at the Paris talks situation in about six weeks' time with a view toward assessing both the progress, if any, and the desirability of considering possible alternatives.

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**161. Memorandum From John Holdridge of the Operations Staff of the National Security Council to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, December 18, 1969.

SUBJECT

NSC Paper on DeFacto Withdrawals from Vietnam

Per your request,<sup>2</sup> we have prepared a summary of the paper on de facto enemy withdrawals from South Vietnam prepared by the Vietnam Ad Hoc Group in accord with an NSC request of July 10.<sup>3</sup> This paper was prepared at a time when a long hiatus was occurring in the departure of new infiltrators for SVN. There was therefore good reason to assess whether the enemy was passing a signal of his intent to de-escalate the war. (Tab A)<sup>4</sup>

Main points of the paper are as follows:

—It could not as yet be concluded what the lull in infiltration signified. It could have meant an intent to de-escalate, it could have been a seasonal pause, or indicative of a change in combat tactics.

—There are a number of criteria important in judging the enemy's intent and the significance of the infiltration slowdown for his force structure. Among these are the net attrition of enemy forces, whether further infiltrators are being trained, and whether some enemy forces are actually being withdrawn.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-213, NSSM Files, NSSM 37. Top Secret; Sensitive; Nodis.

<sup>2</sup> Kissinger made the request in a note on a memorandum from Holdridge, November 28. (Ibid.)

<sup>3</sup> See Document 96.

<sup>4</sup> Tab A was the final draft of NSSM 37, October 30, with the addendum on de facto reduction in and/or withdrawal of forces, which Sullivan sent to Kissinger on October 31; attached but not printed.



—When and if we believe the criteria indicate the enemy is undertaking defacto withdrawals, we should attempt to encourage this by signalling the other side of our intent to respond with further withdrawals of our own.

—We will then face the problem of equating defacto enemy withdrawals with our own drawdown of troops. The paper poses a hypothetical arithmetical relationship. For a 20 percent reduction in enemy strength, for example, we would withdraw up to 60,000 men. For a pullout of some 230,000 of our (500,000 plus) men, Hanoi would have to take out about 80 percent of the North Vietnamese. A balanced, two divisional force of U.S. troops would be left along with necessary combat support and would be withdrawn as the security situation permits.<sup>5</sup>

*Comment:* This paper is largely an exploration of the issues connected with a defacto enemy withdrawal. Although it makes some serious policy recommendations, it is heavily weighted in favor of the military viewpoint. In an actual development of this type, we might feel the need for considerably more flexibility and hence the need for more options on the relationship of our withdrawals to the enemy's.

Since the defacto withdrawal issue seems to be a dead one at present, I do not believe the paper warrants further work at this point. It has been dispatched to Paris and Saigon for their background use.

*Recommendation:*

There should be no further Review Group action on this paper. Copies now in the Secretariat should be distributed for information to the Review Group members, excluding the OEP and USIA.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kissinger wrote the following note in the margin next to this paragraph: "it depends on what level U.S. remains."

<sup>6</sup> Approved by Kissinger on December 29.

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## 162. Editorial Note

On the evening of December 22, 1969, Presidential Assistant Henry Kissinger met with Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin to discuss a number of issues in a private meeting. The discussion on Vietnam follows:

"Dobrynin then turned to the war in Vietnam. He said, 'You have to understand that we tried to do something last April and May, but Hanoi told us that there was no sense having a private channel unless

the United States agreed in advance to negotiate about a coalition government. We cannot tell them how to fight in their own country. This is a real problem to us, and we thought it was best not to return a negative reply.' I said it would have been better to return some sort of a reply, but there was no sense talking about the past.

"Dobrynin then asked me how I saw the future. I said that I really had not come to discuss Vietnam, but to sum it up in a few words, we were very confident. For the first time in my experience with Vietnam, I now was certain that time was working on our side. It seemed to me that Hanoi had only two choices—to negotiate or to see its structure in South Vietnam erode. He said, 'Isn't there even a slight chance that the South Vietnam Government might collapse?' I said that we were confident that we were on the right course. Maybe Hanoi would start an offensive but then, as the President had repeatedly pointed out publicly, it would have to draw the consequences. Dobrynin said, 'Of course, if you start bombing the North again, or if you hit Haiphong, you realize what would happen.' I expected him to say the Soviet Union would come in. But instead, he said, 'What would happen is the Chinese would send in engineer battalions, and you don't want to increase Chinese influence in Hanoi.' I said, 'If you can live with it, we can,' and in any event, our problem was to end the war in South Vietnam.

"Dobrynin said that he did not think that Hanoi had anything new to say for the next few months. I told him that they knew what channels were available and that we would be glad to listen to them if they did. We would be flexible and conciliatory in negotiations. We had no intention to humiliate Hanoi, but we would not pay an additional price to enter the negotiations. Dobrynin asked me whether we were ever going to send a senior Ambassador to the negotiations. I said it depended in part on the negotiations, but I had no doubt that ultimately it would be done. He said he had to admit that nothing was going on at the negotiations now, but that he thought they were an important symbol.

"I said in conclusion that if Hanoi had something to say to us it should do so explicitly, and not get us involved in detective stories in which various self-appointed or second-level emissaries were dropping oblique hints. Dobrynin laughed and said he would be sure to get this point across. He thought Hanoi had nothing to say at the moment.

"The major point about the Vietnam part was the complete absence of contentiousness on Dobrynin's part. There was no challenge to my assertion that our policy was working out, and there was a conspicuous effort by Dobrynin to disassociate himself from the Vietnamese war." (Memorandum of conversation, December 22; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1969, [Part 1]) The full record of this

meeting is in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XII, Soviet Union, 1969–October 1970.

Kissinger sent a December 24 covering memorandum to the President summarizing this conversation with Dobrynin and characterizing the discussion on Vietnam as in a “low key tone. His [Dobrynin’s] threat about what would happen if we started bombing the North again or hit Haiphong—that the Chinese would send in engineer battalions which would increase Chinese influence in Hanoi—seems almost to be an invitation for us to attack North Vietnam.” Kissinger also told the President that “Dobrynin said that he did not think Hanoi would have anything new to say for the next few months.” A note on the covering memorandum indicates that the President saw it and Nixon wrote “K—very fascinating” on the first page of the memorandum of conversation, although all the portions of the conversation underlined by the President related to issues other than Vietnam.

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### 163. Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, December 27, 1969.

#### SUBJECT

Vietnamese Communist Position on a Cease-fire

MACV has in hand a captured enemy document which provides one of the clearest expressions of enemy view on the timing of a cease-fire in Vietnam that we have seen (Tab A).<sup>2</sup> The document consists of notes taken by a medium-level party cadre in South Vietnam during the course of lectures on the content and strategy of COSVN Resolution 9. The notes date from around the end of September.

According to the notes, the Communists will only accept a cease-fire if the U.S. has agreed to total withdrawal, if a coalition government

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 141, Vietnam Country Files, Vol. XIII-2, 11–31 December 1969. Confidential. Sent for information. A notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it. Kissinger wrote at the top of the page: “Al [Haig]—you should discuss this in Saigon.” Holdridge originally sent a summary of this document to Kissinger in a memorandum of December 18, and Kissinger asked him to prepare it as a memorandum for the President. (Ibid.)

<sup>2</sup> Attached but not printed.

“is” formed, and if the Communists are stronger than the allies and are “sure” they can win in “political competition with the enemy.”

*Comment:* This document (which taken by itself cannot be considered conclusive) is about as strong a piece of evidence as we have seen to the effect that Hanoi is not now considering a cease-fire and would, in fact, reject one.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Nixon underlined the last five words of this memorandum and wrote the following marginal note: “K—Perhaps we should examine again—(not right now) a cease fire offer—for *propaganda* only—(However I believe it should come from *Thieu* not from us & only if he feels he could do so without *weakening* his internal situation).”

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#### 164. Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, December 27, 1969.

##### SUBJECT

Cambodian Border

At Tab A is an interesting letter from Marshall Green expressing concern about the political implications of shelling across the Cambodian border and suggesting that a concerted effort be made to minimize such incidents.<sup>2</sup>

Green suggests moving Civilian Irregular Defense Group bases out of enemy artillery range, and indicates, *inter alia*, that:

—In less than a month there have been ten major incidents involving these bases.

—Cambodia may feel forced to break relations if the incidents continue at the present level, and may ask for a Security Council meeting, which Yost believes would prove particularly embarrassing.

Green anticipates that some military leaders may object to his proposal. Field commanders probably will not want to sacrifice the advantages of forward position for these bases and may point out that

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. II, September 1969–9 April 1970. Secret. Sent for information.

<sup>2</sup> Tab A, a letter from Green to Kissinger, December 15, is attached but not printed.

moving these camps out of mortar range will not protect them from long-range artillery and rocket attacks launched from Cambodia.

I do not want to prejudge the issue. However, in the wake of our more forceful actions inside the Cambodian border, relations with Sihanouk actually seem to have improved. Sihanouk also appears to be much more concerned with what is known publicly than what the U.S. actually does. Therefore, a public sign of weakness on our part might hinder our relations. Nevertheless, I believe Green's suggestion deserves careful consideration by all concerned agencies.<sup>3</sup> I am asking for comments from others concerned.

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<sup>3</sup> Nixon underlined portions of the two previous sentences and wrote: "1. Don't tell him what we are *really* doing—! 2. It might be well to do more—in the non public area if possible."

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**165. Memorandum From the Assistant Deputy Director for Coordination in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (McAfee) to the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (Green)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, December 30, 1969.

SUBJECT

Minutes of the Meeting of the 303 Committee, 23 December 1969

The minutes of the meeting of the 303 Committee, dated 30 December 1969, contained the following items:

2. *South Vietnam—The Provincial Reconnaissance UNIT (PRU) Program*

a. Mr. Nelson amplified on the CIA paper dated 11 December 1969<sup>2</sup> and answered a number of questions.

b. The members were unanimous that the program is effective and should be continued through FY 1971 in order to consummate its orderly Vietnamization.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, Country Files, Vietnam, 1969–1970. Secret; Eyes Only.

<sup>2</sup> Document 157.

c. The principal problem involved General Creighton Abrams' desire for a phased withdrawal of the 101 military advisors from the program as soon as possible and in no event later than October 1970. Mr. Packard, who was out of the city and unable to be present, had previously expressed his support for the program as well as his wish to see all military advisors withdrawn as soon as possible, but had indicated that the precise timing of withdrawal might be negotiable.

d. It was the unanimous view of those present that it would be a serious mistake to withdraw all military advisors prior to final turnover of the program to the South Vietnamese in June 1971. In order to maintain adequate supervision and complete the orderly Vietnamization of the program, the following phased withdrawal of personnel was agreed upon, subject to Mr. Packard's later concurrence.

e. The number of military advisors will be phased down from the present 101 to 60 by the end of March 1970. This strength of 60 will be maintained until the end of October 1970 and then reduced to 30 advisors who will remain through the end of the program in June 1971. In the meantime, CIA will increase its advisors by 10 in order to partially offset the loss of military advisors.

### 3. *South Vietnam—Progress Report on Covert Media Activities*

Following Mr. Nelson's briefing and a discussion of the covert media activities described in the CIA paper dated 11 December 1969,<sup>3</sup> the Committee approved the continuation of these activities including the proposed funding level for FY 1970.

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<sup>3</sup> This progress report to the 303 Committee described covert media activity in Vietnam to encourage popular support of U.S. and GVN policy objectives in South Vietnam. The program concentrated on placement of news stories and editorials in South Vietnamese publications, subsidizing one South Vietnamese publication, and efforts to improve journalism, press standards, and South Vietnam's chaotic newspaper distribution system. The cost was \$46,400 for FY 1970. (Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, 303/40 Committee Records, Subject Files, Vietnam, 1965–1969)

**166. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Senior Defense Attaché in France (Walters)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, January 1, 1970.

Following is a message for you to convey to Xuan Thuy or Mai Van Bo on January 12.<sup>2</sup> It should be conveyed orally—no written message should be left with them.

*Begin Message.* My government has studied with the greatest care the communication you delivered to me on December 12.<sup>3</sup> As Mr. Kissinger said on August 4,<sup>4</sup> my government believes that the matters discussed between him and the North Vietnamese Minister Xuan Thuy should go beyond the framework of the plenary meetings at the Majestic Hotel and the private meetings held with members of our delegation, both as to substance and procedure. The purpose of such meetings is to produce the framework for a rapid solution of the conflict on a basis fair to all.

It is in this spirit that my government continues to stand ready for a meeting between Mr. Kissinger and Minister Xuan Thuy. If your side wishes also to talk in this spirit of going beyond the existing framework, we suggest you propose a time and place for such a meeting.  
*End Message.*

After reading this message, you should indicate that it would be preferable to find a date over a weekend, in order to limit speculation about my absence from Washington. If they propose a date, you should say that I cannot come to Paris before February 8.

With regard to the place for a meeting, you should offer to provide a secure location. The meeting could not be held at the North Vietnamese compound, which for this purpose is an object of too much public interest. We are confident a secret, secure location acceptable to both sides can be found. If they suggest other locations at this meeting, you can indicate again our desire for a place which would provide

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 852, For the President's Files—Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. II. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Drafted by Kissinger and William Watts on December 31, 1969; Nixon approved an earlier almost identical draft of this memorandum when Kissinger sent it to him under a covering memorandum of December 30, 1969. Kissinger informed the President that the message would, "place the ball in the North Vietnamese court" and leave it to them "to propose a time and a place." (Ibid.)

<sup>2</sup> Conveyed by Walters to Xuan Thuy in Paris on January 14; see Document 169.

<sup>3</sup> See the attachment to Document 159.

<sup>4</sup> See the attachment to Document 106.

secrecy and security for both sides, and state you will report their suggestions to Washington and provide them with our answer soon.

If they suggest I meet with lesser-ranking representatives, you should emphasize our expectation that Xuan Thuy himself will participate in such a meeting. We would have no objection to Xuan Thuy's bringing along any other North Vietnamese representatives he wishes.

**Henry A. Kissinger<sup>5</sup>**

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<sup>5</sup> Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

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**167. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, January 7, 1970.

SUBJECT

North Vietnamese Military Strategy

Defense Minister Giap's recent article on Hanoi military strategy<sup>2</sup> has drawn considerable attention, both in the press and in U.S. intelligence reports. The following is a review and analysis of its key features.

Basically, the Giap piece is a general strategic primer for use in briefing party cadres, which carefully gives a nod to every military tactic the Communists have ever found useful in the long course of the war. As such, it does not contain a clear blueprint of future enemy military plans, although from the emphasis given to certain strategic and

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 142, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. XIV-1, January 1-15, 1970. Confidential. Sent for information. Received January 10. This memorandum was based on a "Holdridge/Moor analysis" that the NSC Secretariat sent as telegram WHO00108, January 6, to Nixon in San Clemente. (Ibid.) This memorandum is cited in Kissinger, *White House Years* (p. 435). The CIA prepared an intelligence memorandum analyzing Giap's article and Hanoi's intentions, No. 064/70, on January 14. On February 27 Kissinger sent a copy of the intelligence memorandum to Nixon under a memorandum containing a summary similar to the one in this memorandum. Nixon wrote the following note on the February 27 memorandum: "K. It is important for us to inflict maximum casualties on them now—to engage them not avoid."

<sup>2</sup> Giap published a series of articles in Hanoi between December 14-21, 1969.



tactical principles, it is possible to discern the probable general course Hanoi hopes to follow.

#### *Waiting Out U.S. Withdrawal*

Giap's article is probably the clearest evidence yet that the Communists no longer seriously believe they can win the war by direct military means against the present allied military lineup in South Vietnam, with its heavy complement of U.S. combat forces. This comes through in Giap's call for the development of an enemy force thoroughly capable of protracting the conflict, of playing for time, of holding ground, and, hopefully, of consolidating it until the day enough Americans are gone to allow a more even challenge of the GVN's armed forces. Giap thus urges economy in the use of manpower and the building of strong special and guerrilla units which can maintain the VC position without constituting an unbearable burden on the Communists' manpower and material resources.

At the same time, Giap calls for vigorous efforts to cling to the enemy footholds in the countryside, where he notes that the manpower and physical resources necessary to determine the eventual winner in the war are located. This would seem to be an implicit admission of the danger Hanoi sees in continued GVN expansion of its foothold in the rural area via the pacification and Vietnamization programs. Thus, Giap appears to be acknowledging the effectiveness of these programs so far.

Giap also places emphasis on maintaining a strong pace of offensive operations with the initiative remaining on the Communist side. This seems to provide the strategic justification for a strong spring offensive if the enemy believes he can carry it off.

#### *North Vietnam's Role*

The role of North Vietnam in this effort, according to Giap, continues to be that of the "great rear area" supplying needed physical support and serving as the channel for bloc assistance. Curiously, there is little to suggest even obliquely that any major new infusion of manpower is planned from North Vietnam. Giap hints, in fact, that Hanoi may be having increasing trouble in adequately maintaining its compulsory draft system.

Some analysts of the Giap piece have professed to see in it evidence of a split in the Hanoi leadership. One is also struck, however, by the very careful balance and mix of tactics developed by Giap, suggesting that no single or extreme military dictum has gained the upper hand in Hanoi, apart from the emphasis on the gradual, step-by-step approach to the war which has been promoted by the North Vietnamese and applied in military tactics in South Vietnam since shortly after the costly Tet 1968 campaign.

In sum, the article gives good reason to believe that there will be no major, unanticipated shift in Communist military tactics during the coming months and that we can anticipate a continuation, along current lines, of the Communist effort to test the success of Vietnamization.

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**168. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, January 13, 1970.

SUBJECT

Prisoners of War

Secretary of Defense Laird has sent you a memorandum (Tab A)<sup>2</sup> suggesting specific actions in response to your desire to assign the highest priority to the prisoner of war question. These actions are:

—Your designating a special Presidential emissary (perhaps Arthur Goldberg or Ralph Bunche) who could visit the capitals of countries which previously have expressed a concern for our prisoners of war for the purpose of confirming with appropriate government officials the high priority you have assigned to this matter.

—Alternatively, your designating a joint White House/NSC/Defense team to visit the same areas for the same purpose.

—Instructing our delegation in Paris to develop a series of hard-hitting statements on the prisoner question.

—Your reconsidering the proposal of designating the Vice President as your personal representative on prisoner matters.

—Your continuing, in your speeches and statements, to include prisoner of war references where appropriate.

On December 30 Acting Secretary Richardson forwarded State's comments on Secretary Laird's memorandum (Tab B).<sup>3</sup> He expressed general agreement with the strategy outlined by Secretary Laird, but had the following specific remarks concerning each of Secretary Laird's proposed actions:

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 94, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam, U.S. POWs in North Vietnam to April 1970. Secret. Sent for action.

<sup>2</sup> Dated December 20, 1969; attached but not printed.

<sup>3</sup> Attached but not printed.

—The idea of a special Presidential emissary could have merit if the individual were carefully chosen and care taken to assure that his mission did not become enmeshed in other aspects of Vietnam diplomacy.

—The alternative suggestion of a briefing team could also have value. However, the Acting Secretary believed that the State Department should be represented.

—Our delegation in Paris has already raised the prisoner issue repeatedly in the talks. This approach should, of course, be continued.

—The Acting Secretary referred to his previous comments on the possibility of putting the Vice President in charge of prisoner matters, and while welcoming the Vice President's interest in this matter, expressed the view that your own demonstrated personal interest would be the best way of showing that this is a subject of highest importance.

—Accordingly, the Acting Secretary joined in the hope in the last point of Secretary Laird's memorandum that you will continue to speak out on prisoners of war, and offered to provide material for this purpose as appropriate.

Although State's reaction to Secretary Laird's proposed actions suggests some minor reservations, I believe the Acting Secretary's response is fairly close to the line suggested by Secretary Laird. I consider the designation of a special Presidential emissary as useful, but agree with State that the selection must be a careful and judicious one. For example, Arthur Goldberg does not impress me as being an appropriate choice in view of his opposition to your Vietnam policy. The suggestion of a special briefing team to perform the same function as a special Presidential envoy if a suitable candidate cannot be found also appears desirable. As noted in Acting Secretary Richardson's comments, I believe that State should be represented. The delegation in Paris of course should continue to press the North Vietnamese on the prisoner issue. Concerning the Vice President's role, I feel that this might better be finessed for the time being in favor of stressing the part that you yourself might play in spotlighting your own and the Administration's concern over the treatment of our prisoners. I am sure that you will wish to keep up your personal efforts on behalf of the prisoners, and that materials from State and Defense will be useful in this regard.

*Recommendations:*<sup>4</sup>

That you authorize State and Defense to nominate a suitable individual to be designated by you as a special Presidential emissary on prisoners of war.

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<sup>4</sup> Nixon approved all the options on January 16. On January 22 Kissinger sent Laird and Rogers a memorandum asking them to take joint action to initiate the first two and last two recommendations. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 94, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam, U.S. POWs in North Vietnam to April 1970)

That you authorize the organization of a Defense/White House/NSC/State team to perform the functions of a special Presidential emissary if a suitable candidate cannot be found.

That you authorize the issuance of instructions to our delegation in Paris to continue to press the North Vietnamese on the prisoner issue, and to prepare a series of hard-hitting statements for this purpose.

That you hold in abeyance any change in the Vice President's role with respect to the prisoners.

That you authorize State and Defense to provide materials for your use in dealing with the prisoner issue in speeches and public statements.

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**169. Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, January 14, 1970, 5:40 p.m.

K: I just wanted to run thru some information items to you. Walters saw Xuan Thuy today in Paris and gave him a message.<sup>2</sup> They were the friendliest they have ever been. Walters said I wouldn't be available before Feb 8 and they said why so late, why not faster. The reason we said Feb 8 was so we could do it while Bill [Rogers] was out of the country.

Pres: I still think it is a good idea.

K: I just made Walters read something to them. It was to be a framework beyond what was said at the Majestic—if you are willing to talk in the same spirit we suggest you propose a time and place. We suggested Feb 8 and we did not leave a piece of paper with them.

P: But I think the upshot of it is that they want a meeting.

K: That was Walters' impression. They said they would let us know. Whatever they do we will be in good shape. We offered them twice a meeting and whatever they do we are in good shape. If we do go to a meeting they will have to admit they are willing to talk beyond the framework of the Majestic.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 106, Kissinger Office Files, Country Files, Far East, Vietnam, "S" Mister, Vol. 2. No classification marking.

<sup>2</sup> See Document 166.

P: I suppose they will want to take the line they will say what have you got to say. I was reading a couple of nights ago the whole record of Churchill's account on Teheran, Malta and his negotiations with Hariman and what happened in terms of Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, etc. And really it is a shameful record. It is an outrage. I thought Eisenhower was taking the orders from the top but the whole emphasis was on getting along with the Russians whereas Churchill was concerned with re-drawing the map of Europe.

K: He was thinking of what would happen after the war.

P: Right. And the whole thing was the absolute hardness of Stalin during the whole thing. The Russians did not give anything on anything.

K: The Russians got us so focused on victory they never talked about peace.

P: You know that in the days of McCarthy and Jenner they really overstated it but basically they happened to be right. We did screw up the peace.

K: For example, the invasion of Southern France. If those units had been put into the Balkans the whole thing would have been different.

P: I think you should scan through it and see just what happened. He would send a message over and obviously the American President was responding and was responding in an almost unbelievably naive way.

K: And these Kremlinologists were saying just what Thompson told you. You have to be in good faith.

P: Right and Truman turned down a meeting with Churchill first and then came back with the proposition that Truman ought to meet with Stalin first. Well that would have been the most terrible thing. It is well to read this stuff in order to know what we are dealing with now.

K: Hopkins wanted Truman and Roosevelt to be the intermediary between England and Russia, grossly overestimating the British strength and grossly underestimating the Russian intentions.

P: What I am getting it is that I don't know what these clowns want to talk about but the line we take is either they talk or we are going to sit it out. I don't feel this is any time for concession. And mainly because I feel that's the only way we are going to get anywhere is by talking this way.

K: Mr. President I presented these proposals to the meeting of the Special Studies Group today<sup>3</sup> and Elliot Richardson has changed his

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<sup>3</sup> Reference is to the January 14 meeting of the Vietnam Special Studies Group; see footnote 4, Document 171.

mind. He says it would be a grave mistake. So we have some support in State. He said if they are willing I think you should take a shot at it on the 8th. I will give to you what I am going to say—it will be a hard time.

P: First, say we have got to talk about a coalition government. Just close the book and walk out. They will say we have got to talk on basically more points than those.

K: If this analysis we have made is correct they are in trouble. That doesn't mean they are not going to hit us this year. They may hit us this year in the Delta and in I Corps. But that will be their last shot.

P: I agree, they may hit us but they haven't got a lot to hit us with, but it isn't like the Germans in the Battle of the Bulge. They don't have the forces to mount any kind of sustained thing.

K: If we had forces in the Delta I won't worry about it all. They may overrun the VN units, but I don't believe it.

P: Well I have been hearing some good reports about the South Vietnamese forces. Don't you agree?

K: I am going to suspend judgment until Haig comes back. But the smart thing for them to do would be to wait until we draw down more forces and wait until next year. If they hit us this year it will mean our analysis is correct and they are losing. One thing I can do is warn them and tell them if there is an offensive there will be no telling what we will do.

P: Yes, they will have to take note of what the President has said and you cannot be [omission in the source text] as to any commitment on that point. And if that is the way they want it that is the way it will be.

[Omitted here is discussion of the Middle East, Nigeria, and the State of the Union Address.]

**170. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, January 19, 1970.

SUBJECT

Reporting on Vietnamization

I thought I should send you this memorandum in order to let you know of my hesitations about the optimistic reporting which we are receiving on Vietnamization. This is simply a word of caution; I will be providing you later with a more lengthy memorandum<sup>2</sup> after we have proceeded further in the studies we are making of this question.

My doubts about these optimistic reports are based on three observations:

(1) The North Vietnamese cannot have fought for 25 years only to call it quits without another major effort. This effort could come in many ways—through attacks on American forces, ARVN forces or local forces.<sup>3</sup> But if they had decided not to make the effort, they would presumably have been more forthcoming with regard to negotiations.<sup>4</sup>

(2) We have not seen proof that ARVN has really improved. It may be that the enemy forces have been hurt rather than that ARVN is significantly better than it was in the past. It could be that when the enemy drew back its main forces and cut down its activity in August and September, perhaps because of our threat in Paris at the beginning of August, they under-estimated the effect this would have on their guerilla forces.

(3) There could be too much pressure from the top for optimistic reporting. This would suggest that you should move soon to name a new Chairman of the JCS. Uncertainty about Wheeler's successor leads to maneuvering by the potential candidates.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 91, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnamization, Vol. II, January 1970–June 1970. Secret; Eyes Only. Initialed by Kissinger. This memorandum is cited in Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 435.

<sup>2</sup> See Document 171.

<sup>3</sup> In a telephone conversation on January 19 at 6:12 p.m. Kissinger informed the President: "I have just spent an hour with CIA's Chief Analyst [George Carver]. Many things are beginning to bother me. We are only getting infiltration in Laos but not Vietnam. Where are the people? There are lots of trucks." Nixon then expressed the hope that "we are bombing the hell out of those trucks." Kissinger said yes, but wondered if there "was to be a new thrust." The President suggested that "There's nothing left for a thrust." (Transcript of telephone conversation, January 19; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 361, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

<sup>4</sup> Nixon wrote the following comment in the margin next to this paragraph: "makes sense."

**171. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, January 22, 1970.

## SUBJECT

The Situation in the Countryside of South Vietnam

The Vietnam Special Studies Group analysis<sup>2</sup> of the situation in the countryside is producing promising results. Last week, the Group met and accepted without dissent a comprehensive assessment of this subject. The principal findings of this effort are condensed below. Because of the importance of this subject, you may want to also read the fuller treatment of this analysis enclosed at Tab A.<sup>3</sup>

I believe that the concentrated analytical effort that has gone into this study and the fact that its results were very favorably accepted by the community suggest that the situation in the countryside is accurately described by the paper. We are now broadening the effort to include more provinces and sending five analysts to Vietnam to check their findings on the ground.

*The Control Situation*

About 11 million people, some 62 percent of South Vietnam total population live in the countryside. A primary objective of the VC/NVA strategy has been to gain control of the countryside, thereby surrounding the cities so that they "fall like ripe fruit." The GVN has also sought to control this rural population. The principal conflict between the VC and GVN is over the control of the countryside that could enable either side to have access to and deny the other side the benefits of using the countryside for its own purposes.

The essence of control in South Vietnam is that the GVN and Viet Cong exercise it through both political and military organizations.

Therefore, the best indication of control is to be gained from the strength of the GVN and VC political and military organizations that

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 118, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam Special Studies Group. Secret. Sent for information. Nixon wrote at the top of the memorandum: "Excellent *analysis*—Keep on top of it." A draft of this study with Kissinger's queries and comments is *ibid*.

<sup>2</sup> Laurence Lynn and Robert Sanson of the NSC staff led a working group of the VSSG that studied 12 of 44 provinces to determine the accuracy of assessment of Government of Viet-Nam control over the rural population. For Kissinger's account of the drafting of the study, see *White House Years*, pp. 434–435.

<sup>3</sup> Attached but not printed.



affect the population. In this sense, control should be defined as that level of combined political and military strength within the population that *when possessed by one side excludes effective strength by the other side.*

Based on this approach to understanding control, today's situation in the countryside is found to have developed in three broad phases:

—*The Control Stalemate.* From 1964 through the Tet offensive of early 1968, the control situation was relatively stable with the GVN controlling 20% of the rural population compared to VC's 35%. The remaining 45% was under control of both sides.

—*The Viet Cong General Offensive.* During the Tet offensive, GVN control fell by 5% and VC control rose by about 7%, but well over half of the GVN losses were recovered by October 1968 despite the VC May and August offensives.

—*The GVN Control Upswing.* With low levels of enemy activity and a renewed effort on pacification, the GVN's control began to increase rapidly in October 1968. This control upswing has continued through September 1969 when the GVN controlled about 55% of the rural population, the VC controlled only 7%, and the remaining 38% was under the influence of both sides.

This represents a dramatic change in the status of the control war since September 1968: GVN control has increased from 20% to 55%, while VC control has fallen from 35% to 7%. This means that the GVN now controls some six million rural inhabitants; but there are still five million rural inhabitants whom it does not control and who are thus subject to some degree of enemy influence.

#### *Factors Causing Control Changes*

These conclusions regarding the situation in the countryside raise the critical issue of whether the GVN can continue to achieve control gains or whether its recently achieved control gains are likely to be reversed.

To examine this issue, we analyzed the effect on the control war of main forces, local security forces, enemy strategy and tactics, and other important factors influencing change in the countryside. Our conclusions were based on in-depth studies of five provinces selected because of their key role in the war or because they were representative of general conditions in major areas of the country.

#### *Friendly Main Force Pressure*

In four out of the five provinces studied, it was *the vigorous offensive activity of U.S. forces more than ARVN forces which gave the Allies the upper hand in the main force war during 1968.* After the enemy's main forces were gravely weakened by the Tet and May offensives in most areas, it was principally U.S. units which applied relentless pressure on the enemy throughout the following year. Large enemy formations

were either dispersed or they were forced to retreat to remote jungle bases far from populated areas. Under these conditions, the enemy's local security/control apparatus became highly vulnerable and GVN control gains became possible.

#### *Friendly Local Security Forces*

The principal proximate cause of the improved control situation in the past year was *the great shift in the relative strength and effectiveness of GVN and VC local security forces*. Countrywide, RF strength increased 55% and PF 39%. On the other hand, VC guerrilla strength fell by 40% and the infrastructure was also weakened. In most cases, however, GVN local security forces were able to extend GVN control only in the context of a much more favorable Allied posture in the main force war than had existed before 1969.

#### *Enemy Strategy and Tactics*

The enemy was able to cause moderate overall deterioration in control by his general offensive strategy in early 1968, but *he evidently lacked the strength to consolidate his gains*. When he was forced to shift to a more or less defensive posture in late 1968, *he lost the initiative in the control war to the GVN*. He is now attempting to reverse the trend through a new protracted war strategy, but thus far without significant effect.

#### *Other Factors*

In four of the five provinces studied, there were favorable shifts in political support and the quality of GVN officials, and a sense of GVN momentum developed in the control war. These factors contributed to GVN gains, but we are not yet able to determine the extent of this contribution.

Thus, the two decisive factors in changing the control situation after years of stagnation appear to be the aggressive activity of U.S. main force units and the large increase in strength and effectiveness of GVN local security forces in the face of a largely passive enemy.

#### *Future Prospects for the Countryside*

After late 1968, U.S. forces contributed considerably more than ARVN forces to the greatly improved Allied posture in the main force war. At least in the provinces studied, therefore, ARVN prospects for success in taking over the burden of the main force war appear questionable if the enemy is able to rebuild his large units. If there is a further decline in enemy main force strength, however, or a continuation of the status quo, ARVN prospects in this regard are considerably better, especially in view of the 36% increase in ARVN manpower since 1967.

GVN local security forces, on the other hand, have shown both qualitative and quantitative improvement, while Viet Cong guerrillas and infrastructure have declined in numbers and effectiveness. If this trend continues, it will be increasingly difficult for enemy main forces to re-assert their influence in populated areas, and GVN control gains will probably continue. This can occur, however, only in the context of progress—or at least no deterioration—in the main force war.

For the near future, the enemy is likely to continue his strategy of attempting to rebuild both his local control apparatus and his main forces, and to maintain pressure on U.S. and ARVN units to the extent he deems necessary to achieve his goals, probably with economy of force tactics. We are as yet unable to specify the level of effort the enemy must undertake to blunt the GVN pacification initiative, which he is attempting to do at the present time. We suspect this will be a piecemeal effort rather than a massive countryside offensive; and the most likely first target is the Delta. These tentative conclusions are consistent with the themes of COSVN Resolution Nine; that is, they suggest a protracted war strategy. However, the signs we have detected are not inconsistent with a more aggressive effort involving a frontal assault on ARVN and pacification or a concentrated effort to hit selected cities for political reasons.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> On January 21 Kissinger sent a memorandum to the Vietnam Special Studies Group, reiterating the importance that the President attached to the study and suggesting a next phase for the study on a priority basis. At a January 14 meeting the Group agreed, according to Kissinger's memorandum, to have the analysts who did the province analysis "verify and extend their results in Vietnam," have the U.S. Mission in Saigon comment on it, study seven additional provinces, develop detailed maps on the control situation in the five provinces and, if possible, in the additional seven, and develop a concise description of the local conditions existing under VC and GVN control. Kissinger requested additional information on VC infrastructure, the role and effectiveness of local forces, contribution of GVN economic assistance and other civil programs towards control, types of activities by each side that affect the other's control, and whether a distinction could be made between the ability of the GVN to maintain control and to expand control. Kissinger suggested the paper should be prepared by early March. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 118, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam Special Studies Group)

## 172. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, January 26, 1970, 11:06–11:56 a.m.

### SUBJECT

Laos

### PARTICIPANTS

Henry A. Kissinger, Chairman

State

Marshall Green

Jonathan Moore

Defense

Richard Ware

CIA

Thomas H. Karamessines

[name not declassified]

JCS

Admiral Nels C. Johnson

Colonel Bennie L. Davis

NSC Staff

John Holdridge

Colonel Robert Behr

Keith Guthrie

### SUMMARY OF DECISIONS

1. *B-52 Strikes in the Plaine des Jarres*. Mr. Holdridge is to collaborate with Mr. Moore in preparing a memorandum to the President setting forth the three options presented in the Laos Ad Hoc Group study and the agency views and arguments, as discussed at the WSAG meeting. The memorandum should set forth the military argument for action and the two different political arguments—one favorable to a strike and the other opposed. Mr. Kissinger will recommend that the President consult in advance with Secretary Laird and that if the President believes a strike desirable, he also talk with Secretary Rogers before making a decision.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-002, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Secret; Nodis. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room. Robert Behr of the NSC staff sent these minutes to Kissinger under cover of a memorandum of February 23; that memorandum indicates Kissinger saw the minutes on March 27. (Ibid.) Copies of the minutes were also sent to U. Alexis Johnson, Nutter, Karamessines, and Vice Admiral Johnson.

<sup>2</sup> The memorandum was apparently not prepared because of opposition from Rogers and the President's unavailability; see Document 183 and Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 451–452.

2. *Chinese Roadbuilding*. Mr. Kissinger will try to get a decision from the President within the next few days.<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Kissinger opened the meeting with a request for a review of the circumstances that led to the holding of a WSAG meeting at this time.

Mr. Green explained that Ambassador Godley had asked for decisions on both the matters on the agenda.

Mr. Kissinger suggested that B-52 strikes—as the more urgent matter—be discussed first.

*B-52 Strikes in the Plaine des Jarres*

At Mr. Kissinger's request, Mr. Green and Mr. Moore explained the reasons why an immediate decision was needed on a B-52 strike. The concentrated target provided by a recently identified North Vietnamese headquarters in the Plaine des Jarres was likely to disperse within a few days. MACV was prepared to launch a strike in about 24 hours, and Ambassador Godley would require advance notice in order to coordinate with Souvanna.

Mr. [name not declassified] briefed the group on the nature of the target. Intelligence showed a major North Vietnamese headquarters had been established in the Plaine des Jarres. There was no solid information about the number of troops who might be in the target area or the timing of any attack which the North Vietnamese might be planning. However, the available indicators were similar to those which had preceded previous major communist offensives. On the question of troops in the target area, Mr. Moore pointed out that intelligence did not conclusively show a concentration was present, while Admiral Johnson said that Ambassador Godley had referred to 4,000 to 5,000 troops.

Mr. [name not declassified] explained that it was possible that there were this many troops in the area, although this could not be conclusively proved from the available data.

Colonel Davis explained that MACV was proposing six B-52 strikes, for which area reconnaissance had already been undertaken the preceding day (January 25). The enemy threat to the B-52's was no greater than that involved in previous strikes in southern Laos. If the strike were to be made the following day (January 27), MACV would have to be notified by midnight January 26–27, and Ambassador Godley two hours earlier. Ideally, the military would like to have a decision by 6:00 p.m., January 26. If not launched at the earliest time proposed, the strike would have to be put off at intervals of 24 hours, since

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<sup>3</sup> See Document 174.

it was necessary to fly under cover of darkness for security against MIG attacks.

Mr. Kissinger asked if the reconnaissance flights had been observed by the North Vietnamese. Colonel Davis and Admiral Johnson indicated that there was some evidence that the North Vietnamese may have detected the reconnaissance flights and that they would know that B-52's were involved.

Mr. Kissinger then stated the options as put forth by the Ad Hoc Group: (1) B-52 strikes; (2) B-52 strikes accompanied by political signals of a deescalatory nature; (3) no B-52 strikes at the present time. He observed that to take no action would be tantamount to not using the B-52's, since no suitable target would be available for them once the North Vietnamese offensive begins.

Mr. Kissinger then asked individual members for their views.

Admiral Johnson said the JCS favored the strike.

Mr. Green said that the State Department was opposed. By launching a strike in advance of a North Vietnamese offensive, we would be taking the responsibility for escalating the conflict in Laos, and we would have problems with Congressional and press critics in this country. It was important to use all our influence to get the Laotian problem back on a political track. Ambassador Godley's January 25 conversation with Souvanna indicated we might be able to get the RLG to take the initiative in talking to the communists about reducing hostilities. There was danger that the North Vietnamese would interpret a B-52 strike as indicating the U.S. no longer wished to maintain the 1962 accords, especially since the Plaine des Jarres area was territory which had long been under their control.

Mr. Kissinger asked whether anyone had requested us to make the strike and what action the North Vietnamese might take in response to a strike. Mr. Green thought that Souvanna would probably favor a strike but observed that the Laos often failed to put two and two together and did not see the interrelation between military and political actions. The strike would only create a crisis atmosphere. Its military usefulness should not be overrated. We have always realized that the North Vietnamese could occupy northern Laos at anytime. Even if the strike were successful, the communists could bring in more troops, and they might indeed be stimulated by a strike to take stronger action against the friendly Lao forces.

Mr. Ware said that his staff had recommended against the strike because of the political drawbacks. However, on the basis of a conversation that morning with Secretary Laird, he thought it would be advisable for Mr. Kissinger to talk to Laird before a decision was made. Mr. Kissinger said he had talked with Laird that morning and understood his position.

Mr. Karamessines said that CIA favored the strike but with accompanying diplomatic initiatives to minimize its escalatory effect. Mr. Kissinger pointed out that there was no time to take any diplomatic action. Mr. Karamessines went on to say that a strike was desirable to preserve the capabilities of friendly forces in Laos, particularly Vang Pao's Meo troops, and to bolster the morale of Souvanna's Government.

Mr. Kissinger summed up the problem as one of determining the military effectiveness and the political implications of a strike. From a political standpoint, we had to consider that a strike might give the enemy a pretext for stepping up its military campaign. On the other hand, if we failed to strike, the enemy could misinterpret our inaction as a sign of weakness.

Mr. Kissinger then asked about the effect which a B-52 strike might have on North Vietnamese objectives. Would it cause them to delay their attack? Did their build-up indicate that they had already decided to launch an offensive? Would they publicize the attack?

Mr. Moore said it was possible but not certain that a strike would delay an enemy attack. Mr. Green pointed out that the Plaine des Jarres is not the key area, since we know the communists have the capability to occupy it. What is of critical importance is that they not attack the area around Sam Thong and Long Tieng. While they might in any event attack beyond the Plaines des Jarres, a B-52 strike could stir up a hornet's nest and cause the communists to step up their offensive. It is important that we try to continue the delicate balance between communist and friendly forces which has been maintained over the years in Laos. Coming on top of the recent Vang Pao offensive in the Plaine des Jarres, a B-52 strike will convince the communists that we do not want to maintain the 1962 settlement. Mr. Green again emphasized that the area in question was enemy controlled territory, and that we could consider stronger measures such as B-52 strikes if the enemy forces got closer to regions controlled by our friends.

Mr. Moore added that it was also important to consider the signal we will give to Souvanna. It was in our interest to influence his government in the direction of political action rather than military measures.

Mr. Karamessines reiterated the importance of supporting Souvanna and the Meos, who constituted the only friendly fighting force in Laos. We could not expect the North Vietnamese to negotiate. They wanted to destroy Vang Pao by taking the Plaines des Jarres and going on to Long Tieng. This would mean a defeat for us and leave us with a refugee problem.

Mr. Holdridge and Colonel Davis pointed out that the Plaines des Jarres target area was more lucrative than ones that had been hit with previous B-52 strikes in southern Laos.

Mr. Kissinger directed that Mr. Holdridge collaborate with Mr. Moore in preparing a memorandum to the President setting forth the three options and listing agency views and arguments, as discussed at the meeting. Mr. Kissinger would recommend to the President that he talk with Secretary Laird before making a decision and that if the President was inclined to support a strike, he also consult in advance with Secretary Rogers. The memorandum should set forth the military argument for action and the two different political arguments—one favorable to a strike and the other opposed.

The Group then discussed the SNIE being prepared on the objectives of the North Vietnamese in Laos and their possible reactions to developments there.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Karamessines noted that it was now proposed to delay completion of the study for an additional week. All agreed that the study was pertinent to the question at hand but that there was no way of completing it in time for it to be considered in connection with the President's decision on B-52 strikes.

Mr. Kissinger said that in considering the North Vietnamese reaction it was important to separate what they said in public from what they actually believed. Knowing about our Congressional problems, they would undoubtedly publicize any B-52 strike, and we might have to face the problem of how to deal with criticism from the Hill. However, the crucial question was how the communists would view a strike in terms of setting their future objectives in Laos. The key issue was whether a B-52 strike would increase or decrease the likelihood of a communist advance beyond the Plaine des Jarres. Mr. Green said this question would be argued either way.

### *Chinese Roadbuilding*

Mr. Kissinger said the issue was primarily whether a blocking force should be placed below Muong Houn to prevent Chinese roadbuilding activities.

Mr. Moore added that there was also a question of the extent of U.S. involvement in any action that might be taken.

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<sup>4</sup> Reference is to SNIE 58-70, "The Communist View of the Situation in Laos," February 5, which concluded: "Hanoi almost certainly wants to establish hegemony over Laos, but subordinates this goal to its higher priority interest in establishing its control over South Vietnam"; Moscow and Beijing realized that their influence on Hanoi's policy in Laos was limited; stepped up PL/NVN military activity during 1968-1969 was to counter US-supported RLG military initiatives and to prepare for any settlement in Laos; Hanoi wished "to preserve the symbolic authority of the 1962 settlement"; and finally, during the next few months Hanoi would try to recapture the Plain of Jar and eliminate Vang Pao and his forces, thereby forcing Laos to accept a settlement which would halt U.S. bombing in Laos. (Central Intelligence Agency, NIC Files, Job 79-R1012A, NIEs and SNIEs.)



In response to Mr. Kissinger's question Mr. Moore said that a decision was needed as soon as possible. Ambassador Godley had asked for a decision last week, and we have intelligence that Chinese survey teams are already moving south of Muong Houn.

The Group then discussed the forces which might be involved. Mr. Moore said that the Vietnam Ad Hoc group had concluded that a large 1,500 man force of CIA irregulars would create many problems and contribute little toward easing the situation. This proposal had been included primarily because it was suggested by Ambassador Godley. Admiral Johnson agreed that forces of this sort were not required and Mr. Green pointed out that it would take troops away from the defense of other areas.

At Mr. Kissinger's request Mr. Green outlined the rationale for taking some action in response to the Chinese roadbuilding campaign. The roadbuilding was in an area not traditionally controlled by either side. It affected a region close to Thailand. It also provided the Chinese an opportunity to increase their influence with the Pathet Lao.

Mr. Moore explained the option preferred by the Laos Ad Hoc Group. This called for hit-and-run commando attacks which would demonstrate opposition to the roadbuilding but avoid the risk of getting into a real battle involving the Chinese. In response to Mr. Kissinger's question Mr. Moore and Admiral Johnson said that the objective was not to make a stand in the area but merely to discourage the roadbuilding activity.

Mr. Karamessines said that the CIA favored the commando operation.

Mr. Green noted that a small initiative would help to keep the situation under control and reduce the risk that Souvanna might provoke a clash with the Chinese. He had already condoned a Lao Air Force strike in the area. Mr. Moore noted that Ambassador Godley wanted to utilize U.S. Air Force strikes to back up the commando activity.

Mr. Ware raised the question of Thai concern about the roadbuilding, and Admiral Johnson noted that Ambassador Unger had advocated making some response. Mr. Green said that the Thai ought to help out; however, Mr. Karamessines pointed out that the Laos were not anxious to have the Thai in this region.

Mr. Kissinger concluded by saying that he would try to get a decision from the President in the next few days on what to do about the Chinese roadbuilding.

173. **Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)**<sup>1</sup>

Washington, January 26, 1970, 3:30 p.m.

K: We have the following problem. The NVN are building up a large concentration in Northern Laos. We could clobber them in the Plain des Jars. Mel has identified a target and he would like to hit it. In one of those hook ups, it got into State. State is opposed and Bill wants it brought to your attention.<sup>2</sup> There are 14,000 troops in a tight concentration and we expect them to fan out in the next 24 to 48 hours. We should hit them tonight. We may be still able to do it tomorrow. Mel has his man on the Interdepartmental Working Group side with State and he is really in favor of hitting them. The thing that worries Bill is that we have not used B-52's in Northern Laos before. There were no targets there. If it gets to Fulbright, all hell breaks loose. If we don't do it, they will push the force across the Mekong. You don't want to consider this this afternoon. If you don't want to consider it, I will stop the letters.<sup>3</sup> If you do, I could collect the letters and talk to you tonight.

P: I don't want to spend much time on it. But is there a strong argument? What are Mel's arguments for it.

K: A large concentration.

P: Is he really for it or not?

K: He says he is.

P: Are they essential or indispensable? What does he think of the State Department arguments?

K: They are not essential or indispensable. But if we don't they may lose the fear they have and start the offensive all over. It's a close one.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 361, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking.

<sup>2</sup> Kissinger discussed the issue earlier on January 26 with Laird at 9:25 a.m., with Rogers at 10:25 a.m., and again with Rogers at 1 p.m. Laird told Kissinger that he was in favor of the strike, but had informed Defense representatives at the WSAG meeting (Document 172) to oppose it. Kissinger asked, "Are you for it?" Laird responded, "Yes, but not in that channel." Rogers worried that the "escalation" would "play right into Fulbright's hand." In the latter conversation, Rogers suggested that "The military always says they are going to be effective" and suggested, "we could do it later" with "other planes." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 361, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

<sup>3</sup> Reference is to memoranda from Rogers (see footnote 3, Document 183) and Laird to the President. Laird's memorandum has not been found, but he reiterated his reasons for the strike in a backchannel message of February 14; see footnote 8, Document 183.

P: I don't know. I really cannot sense what the real problem is and what there is in it for us.

K: They could be just [omission in the source text] Plain des Jars. If they can push over the '62 agreements with impunity then agreements in VN will not have any meaning.

P: What if it comes out? Will they raise the point (?)

K: Excessive American involvement in Laos.

P: Can we say they are heading for us?

K: No.

P: It's fighting the war in Laos and that's the problem.

K: It's our general position. We cannot make a case that it helps it directly.

P: You get Mel and Bill to chat a bit about it and we will see what their recommendation is. I would lean for it generally but it has to be pretty persuasive if they are not coming at us directly.

K: You have until midnight tonight.

P: Everyone knows we are bombing in Laos. Does the Laos Government request it?

K: Yes and the Thais want it.

P: Get it together and I will see if I have time. But not before 9:30.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The next day, January 27, Kissinger told Laird that "On that northern target, he [Nixon] would like to do, but not on such short notice." Kissinger continued, "We have to let this target go and have a meeting on giving you authority to hit with B-52s in that area when they develop." Laird responded that the President "was after me to hit target there", so he would order tactical air strikes. Laird continued: "it's the best target we've had since I became Secretary of Defense—they should start hitting it now. Four thousand troops won't stay together that long." Laird complained that "Bill Rogers is raising hell with me as if I were irresponsible." Kissinger told Laird: "The President is on your side." Laird countered: "He's usually on my side, but I usually don't get anywhere. I appreciate the sympathy, though." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 361, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

**174. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, January 31, 1970.

## SUBJECT

Lao Request for US Support for Operation Against Chinese Road Building in Laos

Prime Minister Souvanna and the King have been pressing us to use CIA-sponsored guerrilla forces to take action against Chinese road building activity in Laos which appears intended to extend a motorable road from Muong Houn in north-central Laos to Pak Beng on the Mekong (see map at Tab A).<sup>2</sup> This road already extends from the Chinese border to Muong Houn. The Lao, and also the Thai, are greatly concerned over the possibility that the Communists could use the road to move strong forces to the line of the Mekong. If the Communists should do so, not only would they improve greatly their strategic position in Laos, their penetration of strategic areas of Northern Thailand where Communist subversion is already a serious problem would be facilitated. The Thai, of course, are greatly concerned. Ambassador Godley in Vientiane has supported in principle Souvanna's request that something be done. The RLG itself does not have units which could effectively carry out this sort of operation.

The problem is complicated due to the fact that in 1962 the Lao Government asked for Chinese assistance in building roads, and Souvanna himself indicated in 1968 that he could see no basic objection to Chinese construction of a road that went from the Chinese border no further than Muong Houn. Aerial photography has now picked up survey activity south of Muong Houn, and Souvanna wants to move now. He has already sanctioned a Lao air strike against the road north of Muong Houn, and has repeatedly urged us to support him in establishing a blocking position on the ground between Muong Houn and Pak Beng. (We have urged him to make no more air strikes for the time being.)

*The Options*

The WSAG on January 26 considered Souvanna's request.<sup>3</sup> Three basic options were discussed:

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Files, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-071, WSAG Meeting, Laos, January 26, 1970. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for action.

<sup>2</sup> Attached but not printed.

<sup>3</sup> See Document 172.

1. Inserting a 1,500 man force, drawn primarily from irregulars but also including Lao army units, to control the area between Muong Houn and Pak Beng; tactical air support would be with Lao air force T-28s, but USAF tactical aircraft might be required if the force were challenged. Air America would provide aircraft, but there would be no American advisors on the ground.

2a. Mounting small scale hit-and-run guerrilla operations to strike at facilities or personnel or mine the construction area south of Muong Houn; air support again would be with Lao air force T-28s.

2b. Option 2a, with the addition of USAF tactical air support on enemy targets south of Muong Houn.

3. No military action but inducing the Lao to undertake a political initiative against the road.

### *The Issues*

*Option 1* is what Souvanna wants. Its advantage would be that it would show firmness of purpose and might at least temporarily stop the Chinese due to the increased military effort they would need to deal with it. It would also improve our relations with the Lao and Thai. However, it risks a confrontation with China, would create a second front of some magnitude, might be interpreted by the enemy as US opposition to a political settlement since the territory is considered by the Communists to be on “their side” of the 1962 line, and most importantly, would draw manpower and resources away from the critical Plain of Jars front which the Lao cannot spare. The force would not be large enough to block a really determined effort by the other side to push on.

*Option 2a* is a compromise proposal. Its advantages are that it would signal opposition to road construction beyond Muong Houn, would require only a moderate investment of resources, and would minimize US involvement. Lao forces needed elsewhere would be less affected. It would have most of the advantages of *Option 1*, including satisfying the Lao and Thai. Its disadvantages are that its size would definitely be inadequate to stop a really determined effort and the Lao air force support might be both insufficient and uncontrollable in terms of where they bombed (e.g. north of Muong Houn, which we want to avoid).

*Option 2b* would have the advantage of providing adequate and controllable air support. On the other hand, it would increase US involvement in a new area in Laos and would have the potential for bringing a direct US-Chinese confrontation.

*Option 3* would underline the US and Lao desire for a political rather than a military solution and might advance the opening of political talks. Its disadvantages are that it would neither satisfy the Lao

and Thai nor deter the Communists, who might read it as a sign of weakness. Moreover, Souvanna might then take action on his own which could have adverse political and military repercussions.

(At Tab B is a paper submitted to the WSAG by the Interagency Ad Hoc Group on Laos which outlines the options and issues in greater detail.)<sup>4</sup>

The WSAG on balance decided to support Option 2a. A deciding factor was Souvanna's urgent desire for help and determination to go ahead without us in its absence; in fact he has said that unless he hears from us in 48 hours he will take action on his own. In view of his lack of ground forces, this would probably mean stepped-up attacks by Lao T-28s against the Chinese north of Muong Houn. I believe that Option 2a is the best of the courses open to us in view of the desirability of deterring the Communists on another front, or at least forcing them to reveal more of their intentions, and of reassuring the Lao and the Thai that we will stand by them against a threat which to them is very real. Moreover, the Lao resources would not be strained and our own role would be minimal. The risk of a US-Chinese confrontation would not be very great. Our contribution would be to provide a helicopter lift for the guerrillas and to airlift supplies. We of course have no assurance that Option 2a would be sufficient to cope with the situation, but we stand to delay a further extension of the road and learn more of Chinese, North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao objectives.

*Recommendation:*<sup>5</sup>

That you authorize the adoption of Option 2a, as outlined above.

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<sup>4</sup> The paper was attached to a January 24 covering memorandum from Moore to Kissinger. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-071, WSAG Meeting, Laos, January 26, 1970)

<sup>5</sup> The President wrote "2b" on the approval line. Kissinger informed Laird, Rogers, and Helms of Nixon's decision in a February 5 memorandum, and on behalf of the President directed that the operation should be undertaken provided the Royal Lao Government was willing "to put on record, in a form that the United States Government may cite as necessary," that there was no outstanding request by the Royal Lao Government for road construction by the Chinese. (Ibid.)

**175. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State<sup>1</sup>**

Saigon, January 31, 1970, 1140Z.

1515. Subject: Discussion with President Thieu January 30—Corruption. Ref: Saigon 1514.<sup>2</sup>

1. Having set the stage for my remarks on corruption, I had a very frank talk with Thieu saying that I felt that of the three problems I had mentioned (reftel) corruption “is now the number one problem”. I then said that this was his problem, but it was also ours. The inability of the GVN to do anything about high level corruption is sharply affecting my ability—the American ability—to help you. The problem is thus a problem of Vietnamese-American relations.

2. I said that during the last few months the McClellan Committee had been holding hearings on black market currency transactions in Vietnam. Many Americans had been named, as well as Indians, Chinese and Vietnamese operators. These names were well known to the GVN authorities. The losses to the RVN were spectacular, running to many tens of millions of dollars a year. Congressional and press criticism had been so sharp that the President had ordered establishment of a high-level inter-agency committee in Washington to deal with this problem.

3. I said that unless there is some real progress in the attack on corruption I see serious trouble ahead—politically, economically, and in his relations with the US.

4. I said the GVN had asked US for more assistance for their forces in food and housing as they take on more responsibilities. In the present mood of the Congress it would be very difficult for the President

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 15–1 VIET S. Secret; Nodis. On January 12 Nixon asked White House Staff Assistant John Brown to send Kissinger a memorandum asking that Bunker do “some quiet work” on corruption in South Vietnam. (Memorandum from Lake to Brown, January 21; *ibid.*, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 142, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. XIV–2, 16–30 January 1970) Kissinger dispatched a backchannel message to Bunker asking him what could be done about corruption in South Vietnam. (Telegram WH003 to Bunker, January 21; *ibid.*, Box 410, Backchannel Messages, Southeast Asia, 1970) Bunker responded in backchannel message 622 from Saigon, January 23, to the White House for Kissinger’s eyes only, on the ways to combat it much as he explained the problem and solutions to Thieu as reported in telegram 1515 from Saigon. (*Ibid.*) In a January 26 memorandum to Nixon, Kissinger summarized Bunker’s initial response to the request for “quiet work” on corruption and indicated Bunker planned to raise the issue with Thieu in the next few days. (*Ibid.*, Box 142, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. XIV–2, 16–30 January 1970)

<sup>2</sup> Telegram 1514, January 31, transmitted a summary of the Thieu–Bunker conversation of January 30 on issues other than corruption. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 15–1 VIET S)

to get more assistance unless the GVN demonstrated its willingness to tap available sources of revenue which are now outside of its control. As an example I cited that the revenue loss from black market cigarettes alone may be as high as 2.5 billion piasters a year. One Vietnamese factory had to shut down because of the flood of foreign cigarettes into the black market. Far greater amounts were lost to the government through illegal currency dealings, some of which seemed to take place with the tolerance of the authorities.

5. We on our part were trying to do some things to limit American involvement in corruption. Our mission had long had an illegal practices committee to examine reports of black marketing, illegal currency operations, pilfering of government supplies, etc. I understood that within the last few days he had formed a committee on corruption to be chaired by the Minister of Finance and including the Ministers of Economy and Interior, the Governor of the National Bank, and the Director General of the National Police. I termed this a constructive move and suggested that the two committees work together.

6. We had also taken drastic steps here to control the use of military payment certificates, US currency, travelers' checks and bank drafts by American and allied foreign payments to third country nationals were now made in piasters; any dollar payments went to the government and were converted into their currencies. We no longer allowed allied forces to use any American PX, they now had their own PX's and each was rationed in terms of supplies. Strong controls had been established over all allied clubs and messes in relation to cigarettes, liquor and food purchases. Gift items now had to be mailed at the time of purchase and could not be taken away. The effect of all this had been to greatly reduce American supplies which could go into the black market.

7. American soldiers or government or contract employees who were caught illegally engaging in currency transactions were tried and punished, and civilians are sent home. However, I said, there were still hundreds of Americans legally or illegally in the country who were deeply engaging in the black market. We had asked the Prime Minister a month ago to see that these men were deported and not allowed to return, and we had offered to cooperate with him. I regretted to say nothing had been done.

8. I went on to say that obviously there were many aspects to corruption. It could not be entirely eliminated, but it could be greatly reduced by a variety of measures. Obviously Thieu had to decide where he could move with vigor and where he could not do all that he would like to do. Among the most glaring kinds of trafficking that had come to our attention I listed the following:

9. First, there were the notorious organized rings that operate at Tan Son Nhut and in the ports to bring in goods and smuggle currency.



These rings were obviously protected by high government officials. Customs and fraud supervision squads could do little and were not to be blamed. Obviously it was a tolerated racket. The result, I said, was that the GVN was losing billions in revenue and the illegal demand for dollars was weakening the piaster.

10. Another large demand for black market currency was coming from the practice of under-invoicing which deprived the GVN of much needed customs revenue. So-called travelers to and from Hong Kong, Vientiane, Bangkok, and Singapore are engaged in a large traffic of goods for which little or no customs are paid as well as in illegal currency and gold movements. Some of this may provide revenue for the government in an indirect way, but most of it clearly just goes into the private pockets of individuals with protectors in high places.

11. We had been talking about the need for an accommodation rate and the benefits that would accrue to the government if foreigners would start changing their money legally. But what was the use of establishing a more realistic rate if the piaster was constantly being further weakened so that the black market dollar rate continued to rise? It could be brought down, I said, only by a vigorous campaign on many fronts including closing down the smuggling of goods at Tan Son Nhut and the ports, deporting foreigners who were here on the black market, etc. There is real danger that the piaster rate may rise even higher; if that happens it can create dangerous economic and political problems for the government.

12. In short, I said, some radical measures were required against the large-scale corruption which was running the economy and sapping the political strength of the country. Too many people were bleeding the economy for their private benefit. All this was gravely impairing the GVN's image abroad and especially in the US. Finally, I said, corruption was a moral problem for it involved the whole question of morale—of the military, of the government servants, of the people generally. A corrupt society, I said, is a weak society. It is a society in which everyone is for himself, no one is for the common good. "It is in such a situation that everything you and we have worked so hard to create can be undermined unless you move with energy."

13. Thieu had followed attentively without interrupting, and had taken notes as I spoke. When I finished he said he was glad I had brought the matter up because it was also one of great concern to him. He had already appointed the committee to which I had referred, although he was not certain how effective it could be and he thought it important that we should work together on the problem of corruption for we had sources of information that could be useful, and of course some of our people were also involved as well as many Vietnamese and other foreigners. It was important to try to get at the sources of corruption, to identify them and move in on them.

14. Thieu then suggested that instead of the two committees just cooperating together we should establish a joint committee or a mechanism for close liaison so that efforts at control could be coordinated. He was aware that much smuggling was going on at the airport and the harbors, and he agreed that the time had come to move in on it vigorously. He mentioned that he had come under some pressure from Vietnamese businessmen recently who had complained that illegal imports and black marketing were undercutting prices and ruining their business. Thieu said he would like to meet again on this subject just after Tet. He intended to get suggestions from his people immediately on how we could best work together, and he would welcome also more detailed suggestions from us.

15. *Comment:* I think it is possible that Thieu may in fact welcome American pressure to move more vigorously on this front. While we must not expect miracles, I think he recognizes better now that corruption is not just an internal problem but also a problem in his foreign relations; that it is not merely one of his economic problems but perhaps the most important one; and indeed quite possibly one of the most important among all his problems. The most important thing now is to get some momentum going, and to let Thieu get the word out to the right people that he means to show results soon.

**Bunker**

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**176. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, January 31, 1970.

SUBJECT

CIA Assessment of Vietnamization

The CIA has produced the attached narrative review of Vietnamization progress and prospects (Tab A).<sup>2</sup> It is based on a study of

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 91, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnamization, Vol. II, January 1970–June 1970. Secret. Sent for information. In his memoirs Kissinger cites the attached CIA study and Nixon's comments. (*White House Years*, p. 436)

<sup>2</sup> Tab A is CIA Intelligence Memorandum No. 9469/70, "Vietnamization: Progress and Prospects," January 23; attached but not printed.

the views of ARVN commanders, and on an analysis of ARVN performance and the current activities of enemy forces.

The memorandum concludes that the real test of Vietnamization will probably not come until at least the end of 1970, by which time the Communists anticipate a substantial further reduction of US ground forces. Meanwhile, there have been both bright and disappointing spots in the performance of SVN forces. It is clear that the ARVN, especially, still has a considerable way to go in developing both the technical skills and the will to fight necessary to cope with a threat of the magnitude currently posed by enemy forces.

Some of the specific points made in the CIA assessment are as follows:

—There is sound evidence that the territorial forces (regional and popular units) have greatly improved over the past year in all the standard indicators of efficiency, most notably their KIA rate. It must be recognized, however, that the improvement is based on a very poor performance base originally, and that further gains will come harder.

—By contrast, the performance of the ARVN regular units has declined in the past year when measured in statistical terms such as the KIA rate, combat contacts, etc. This is not so much a reflection of deterioration in ARVN capabilities as an indication of a shift in enemy tactics toward initiatives primarily aimed at the territorial forces.

—Late last year, surveys of the views of top ARVN leaders on Vietnamization found most of them optimistic about the future. Recently, however, a similar survey revealed a growing pessimism with concern<sup>3</sup> centered around the fear of an overly hasty American withdrawal which would leave the ARVN badly vulnerable to renewed Communist main force pressures. It is worth noting that the pessimism has increased as the ARVN combat load has risen.

### *Progress by Corps*

*I Corps.* ARVN units, among the GVN's best, have continued to hold the populated coastal sectors effectively. Communist main force units were largely driven out of these areas by US and GVN forces by early 1969. The Communists have not tried to mount a major new push since then, but do have large forces located in nearby border sanctuaries from which they could quickly intensify pressures along the coast.

*II Corps.* The first real test of Vietnamization occurred here in the summer when the Communists laid siege to two Vietnamese border strong-points. The results were inconclusive. Some ARVN units performed well, and the Communists suffered heavy losses, largely as a

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<sup>3</sup> Nixon underlined the phrase, "a similar survey revealed a growing pessimism with concern" and handwrote the following comment: "K—The psychology is enormously important. They *must* take responsibility if they are *ever* to gain confidence. We have to take risks on that score."

result of allied air power. However, they never really tried to take the camps, and one ARVN regiment was badly demoralized as a result of its combat experience. Along the coast, the ARVN has been holding its own, but its leaders fear the withdrawal of any American ground units from this sector in the foreseeable future.

*III Corps.* ARVN units here have traditionally been among the weakest in the country, and the US program has concentrated on raising their effectiveness. As a result some gains have been noted in two of the divisions, but the division closest to the enemy along the Cambodian border is still performing very poorly and could not hold its own against the Communist units arrayed in the area, if left without substantial US ground support.

*IV Corps.* The ARVN division which filled in for US ground units withdrawn in the upper Delta has so far not performed very effectively, and the enemy has begun to rebuild his position. The recent replacement of the division commander could help remedy this situation, however. The picture is brighter in the lower Delta where one of the ARVN divisions is considered as good as any GVN unit in the country. However, the Communists clearly intend to mount a strong test of Vietnamization in the Delta and have moved in several regiments in the western provinces to strengthen their position. ARVN performance against them so far has been mixed.

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## 177. Memorandum for the President's File<sup>1</sup>

Washington, February 1, 1970.

RE

Early-Afternoon Meeting in the President's Office with Ross Perot (12:45–1:35 p.m.)

Ross Perot entered the President's office by way of Dwight Chapin's office. The President got up from his desk, came forward and shook Ross's hand, then suggested that all of us take seats near the fire.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, Memoranda for the President, Box 2, 2/1/70. No classification marking. Drafted and initialed by Butterfield.

The President opened the discussion right away and for some 10–12 minutes told Ross how valuable he thought his recent (Christmas season) round-the-world trip had been. He said that even though food and other goods had not been delivered to U.S. prisoners of war in Hanoi, in his opinion the publicity which had been given to the trip was well worth the \$600,000 spent. He said, too, that Ross could be proud of his post-trip press conference and talk-show performances. Then, before Ross could speak, the President went on to comment about the views he knew Ross held on the Federal government's current activities to relieve the plight of U.S. prisoners. He said that he agreed with Ross that we could probably do much more than we are doing.<sup>2</sup> He said, too, that he could well understand Ross's surprise at the calibre of some of the members of the International Red Cross teams. Reiterating his continued interest in resolving the POW dilemma, the President said he felt that a separate team, or organization, was needed—something independent of, or at least detached from, the State Department.<sup>3</sup>

Then Ross reviewed the highlights of his trip to Southeast Asia and Copenhagen . . . and just started to outline the kind of plan he thinks will promote some action when the telephone next to the President rang. It was John Ehrlichman calling on another matter (Secretary Hardin's memo on farm policy). The President talked to John for 3 or 4 minutes—then excused himself and went back to his small office sitting room for another 8–10 minutes. When he returned he asked Ross to go on with his action plan concept.

Ross spoke of the value of actions teams and described such a team thusly: a group made up of very few people, all of whom have past

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<sup>2</sup> On a January 31 briefing memorandum from Butterfield to the President, prepared for this meeting, Nixon wrote to Kissinger: "K note my notes. I am *not* satisfied with our *governmental* activities here. Have a quick study made & give me a new game plan for 1. Government & 2. private action. Let's see some unconventional plans." In his briefing memorandum Butterfield wrote that Perot had expressed surprise that since his return from his trip on which he had spent \$600,000, "no one seems to be particularly concerned, grateful . . . or even curious." (*Ibid.*, NSC Files, Box 94, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam, U.S. POWs in North Vietnam to April 1970)

<sup>3</sup> In a February 3 memorandum to Kissinger, Butterfield stated: "the President has in mind the creation of a small White House group which will concern itself solely with matters pertinent to relieving the plight of American prisoners in Southeast Asia." Butterfield added that Nixon envisaged "an action-oriented team—1, 3, 4, or 5-man unit to concentrate on all possible ways—conventional and unconventional—to bring to bear on the Hanoi government pressure sufficient to revert its view of American captives as an asset to one in which they are considered a liability." According to Butterfield, Nixon wanted the unit to cut through red tape, move quickly into the field, and have as its objectives inspections of POW facilities, free exchange of mail, release of POWs' names, release of sick and wounded POWs, and eventual release of all POWs. (*Ibid.*)

records indicating one outstanding success after another . . .<sup>4</sup> given a task . . . a deadline for completion . . . and no other duties. “This,” said Ross, “creates a ‘succeed or fail’ environment. It was this technique—this kind of environment—which was responsible for NASA’s putting a man on the moon. Frank Borman will vouch for that.”

Ross went on to tell how much good he thought action teams would be within the State Department—and within HEW. In fact, he said that he had talked to Bob Finch about the concept—about small teams, each concentrating on a major problem area—reviewing the issue, travelling out to the field and observing first-hand the conditions responsible for the problem, returning to hash out possible solutions, and finally reporting a recommended course of action (with valid alternatives) to the department Secretary. The President said that the principle was a good one.

Ross then returned to the POW topic and stated the opinion that the action team system would *certainly* do more than is being done to relieve the plight of U.S. prisoners. When he finished, the President thought for a moment—then said that a White House team, or at least a White House team director, should serve to make the priority on this matter more clear . . . not only to the Hanoi Government and the U.S. public, but our Departments of State and Defense as well. He told me to get from Henry Kissinger, without delay, two reports: one on all US–POW relief operations going on now in Laos (i.e. all covert and overt activities designed to “pick-up” or otherwise secure the freedom of captive persons) with some figures to show effort expended and successes achieved; and one bearing the same kind of information relative to South Vietnam. He said, too, that by February 15th he wants a game plan on how best to organize a White House team, the sole duty of which will be to work for:

- Impartial inspection of POW facilities
- Free exchange of mail and packages
- Release of a list of names of all known prisoners
- The earliest possible release of all prisoners.

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<sup>4</sup> On February 12 Kissinger responded to a request from the President for a report on previous operations in Laos and South Vietnam to free POWs. Kissinger summarized two attached reports, one by CIA on efforts in Laos and one by the Embassy in Vietnam on recovery operations in South Vietnam. In Laos, Kissinger described CIA intelligence efforts to locate and rescue U.S. POWs, but stated that the “results of all these efforts have been zero.” In South Vietnam, Kissinger reported that one POW was recovered, but he died from wounds inflicted by his guards. In both Laos and Vietnam, Kissinger reported that hundreds of Lao and Vietnamese POWs had been rescued. Nixon wrote the following comments: “K. 1. A tragic, frustrating operation. 2. Would a shake up—a new approach help? Possibly the present team is worn out & unimaginative?” (Ibid.)

Although Frank Borman's name was mentioned briefly as a candidate for the directorship of this team, no firm decisions were made.

The informal meeting adjourned, and Ross thanked the President for taking so much time with him on a Sunday afternoon. The President said it was good to see Ross again, and that he felt as though some very worthwhile things had been accomplished.

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### 178. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, February 6, 1970.

#### SUBJECT

Enemy Manpower Situation in Vietnam

This memo summarizes the enemy's manpower situation and its strategic implications over the first six months of 1970.

#### *The Enemy's Current Strength*

The Washington intelligence community is in rough agreement that the enemy's current manpower situation is as follows:

—The enemy's *military* forces number about 280,000–310,000 men including *at the most* 150,000 main force regulars, 80,000 support troops, and 80,000 guerrillas.

—Despite heavy infiltration and recruiting, the enemy military forces have *declined* by about 28% (100,000 men) over the last two years with about half (40,000 to 50,000 men) of the decline occurring during 1969.

#### *Enemy Losses*

The enemy's manpower losses are caused by combat deaths, deaths caused by wounds or illness, desertions, and Allied captures. However, over the last two years, the enemy's overall losses, particu-

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Country Files, Vietnam, March 1970. Secret; [codeword not declassified]. Sent for information. In a February 5 covering memorandum Lynn informed Kissinger that this summary was done by John C. Court of the NSC's Program Analysis Staff based on the Vietnam Special Study Group Enemy Capabilities Panel's report. Lynn recommended that the summary be sent to the President. A note on the memorandum indicates it was "ret-d, Feb. 20, 1970." The VSSG's report, "A Review of Enemy Manpower Indicators in the War in Southeast Asia" SC 14685/69, December 1969, is *ibid.*, Haig Special Files, Vietnam File, Vol. 4 (Jan–Feb, 1970) [2 of 2].

larly combat deaths, appear to have been largely determined by the enemy's activity rates.

—When enemy activity is *high*, as during January–June 1968, the enemy's overall losses have run about 32,000 men monthly—20,000 combat deaths and 12,000 losses from other causes. By sustaining these losses, the enemy was able to initiate an average of about 470 attacks monthly.

—When enemy activity is *moderate*, as during January–June 1969, the enemy's overall losses have averaged about 27,000 men monthly—16,000 in combat deaths and 11,000 from other causes. At this manpower cost, the enemy was able to launch about 370 attacks monthly.

—When enemy activity is *low*, as during June–December 1969, the enemy has been able to hold his overall losses to about 20,000 men monthly equally divided between combat and non-combat losses. During this period, enemy-initiated attacks averaged 233 monthly.

Thus, the enemy has, to a large extent, been able to control his losses by increasing or decreasing the aggressiveness of his forces. While there is no real limit on these fluctuations in enemy losses, the enemy probably considers that a certain level of activity is necessary to maintain the momentum of his war effort and his control of a portion of SVN's population. Moreover, allied-initiated operations undoubtedly impose certain losses on the enemy as the price for retaining his forces in South Vietnam even if they are inactive.

For these reasons, it is likely that there is some minimum level of losses that the enemy will either choose or be forced to sustain. Looking at enemy losses during past periods of low activity, this minimum loss rate may be about 20,000 men monthly, including 10,000 combat deaths.

#### *Enemy Manpower Gains*

The enemy meets its manpower requirements from two principal sources—infiltration and recruitment. Judging from recent experience, the enemy can count on these sources of manpower to provide replacements at the following rates:

—*Infiltration* will provide most of the enemy's manpower gains. While only about 15,000 infiltrators will arrive in South Vietnam during January–March 1970, the enemy increased its manpower in the pipeline to South Vietnam by about 15,000 men in January alone. If additions to the pipeline continue at this rate, the enemy could infiltrate 60,000 men into SVN during the first six months of 1970.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Attached but not printed was an undated explanation of infiltration estimates which indicated that they were "based largely on intercepts of *uncoded* enemy rear area communications" which "frequently provided detailed information on the number, strength, and destination of enemy infiltration groups." Collateral evidence such as prisoner interrogations and captured documents verified this intelligence. Since the primary evidence was uncoded, it could be misleading if the North Vietnamese were aware of the fact that they were being intercepted. Furthermore, rear services communications did not cover all infiltrators, and if North Vietnam chose, they could infiltrate large units using radio silence.



—*Recruitment.* While the enemy is capable of increasing his recruiting in SVN for a short period of time, his recruiting rates have been low (4,000 to 6,000 men monthly) in recent months and he may not be able to increase them greatly without a strong and successful effort to increase the population he controls and the recruiting base it affords. Without such an increase, the enemy cannot count on more than about 36,000 new recruits during the first six months of 1970.

If recruitment and infiltration follow this pattern, the enemy will add about 100,000 men to his military forces during this period. However, these additions will enable the enemy to offset his likely losses only if he maintains a low rate of activity. If the enemy maintains a moderate or high rate of activity, his losses will more than outnumber his manpower gains and the overall strength of his forces will continue to decline.

Thus, even with the recent increase in infiltration, the enemy probably cannot build-up his forces unless he decreases his activity below the lowest levels of the recent past or greatly increases recruiting.

#### *Future Enemy Options*

The current enemy manpower situation is not bright. If recent trends in infiltration, recruiting, and losses continue, the enemy will continue to suffer a slow attrition in the strength of his military forces. However, this decline is not inevitable and the enemy could build-up his forces if he chose to. In particular, he could:

—Reduce his activity to a virtual standstill (10,000 losses monthly) while maintaining an infiltration rate of about 15,000 men monthly. By June 1970, the enemy might be able to increase his force level by about 30,000 men by June 1970.

—Step up infiltration to 25,000 men monthly, as during early 1968, while maintaining his present low activity rates. By June 1970, the enemy's forces could be increased by 30,000 men.

However, these strategies would not allow the enemy to carry out a *countrywide* offensive for longer than a month without suffering some reduction in his force strength. For instance, the enemy losses *in combat deaths alone* were almost 40,000 men monthly at the height of the 1968 Tet offensive. An offensive confined to a particular region such as the Delta would, however, require far smaller inputs of manpower and be more reasonable given the enemy's manpower resources.

#### *Summary*

To maintain his force levels, the enemy will have to continue infiltration at its January rate of 15,000 men monthly while holding his activity to the low rates of late 1969. By further increasing infiltration or greatly reducing activity, the enemy could build-up his force levels for an offensive by June. However, the most likely prospect is that the enemy's force strength will continue to slowly decline.

179. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, February 12, 1970.

SUBJECT

Status Reports on Cambodia—Secretary Rogers and Prince Sihanouk

Secretary Rogers has sent you a report on progress in our relations with Cambodia (Tab A),<sup>2</sup> in which he summarizes developments, trouble points, and actions in progress.

*Favorable Developments:* Our Chargé has been cordially treated. The Cambodian armed forces have begun to accept information from our Attachés as to details of the VC/NVA presence in Cambodia, have used this information in their operations, and have forewarned us of their aerial reconnaissance plans, to avoid encounters. (The report also cites several other favorable trends which are less clear and not demonstrably related to our reestablishment of diplomatic relations.)

*Trouble Points:* Secretary Rogers lists continued arms supply *via* Cambodia to the Communists, a rise in incidents involving US forces in Cambodia, and the Cambodian defoliation claims. Sihanouk has handled these last two points of irritation very circumspectly.

*Action in Progress:* The Secretary lists these actions planned or underway:

—Visible US participation in cross-border reconnaissance patrols into Cambodia is being reduced.

—DOD is studying a pull-back of Special Forces camps near the border, to reduce the likelihood of incidents on Cambodian soil.<sup>3</sup>

—We are developing better procedures to alert the Cambodians to VC/NVA activities in Cambodia.

—Secretary Rogers expressed regret for the November 16 incident, and we are making solatium payments when Cambodians are killed or wounded.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. II, September 1969–9 April 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. Holdridge sent this memorandum to Kissinger recommending that he ask the President to instruct the Department of State to evaluate the pros and cons of resuming a limited aid program to Cambodia. (Ibid.)

<sup>2</sup> Tab A is attached but not printed.

<sup>3</sup> Nixon wrote next to this paragraph: "K, no if it in any way reduces our capabilities to combat V.C. in Cambodia."

—Arrangements are being made to compensate for defoliation damage in such a way as to avoid an acrimonious debate in Congress.<sup>4</sup> (This is responsive to a suggestion by Senator Mansfield.)

—Espionage activities against Cambodia are being cut back, and no CIA personnel are assigned to our Embassy in Phnom Penh. (Also a suggestion by Senator Mansfield.)

Perhaps the most telling evidence of the improvement of our relations with Cambodia is contained, not in the status report, but in an article which Prince Sihanouk himself wrote for the December issue of the official journal *Sangkum* (Tab B).<sup>5</sup>

Prince Sihanouk, in that article:

—briefly disposes of the suggestion that he should be grateful for the US presence in Asia, *but*

—argues that “in all honesty and objectivity” the US presence “permits us to be *respected*, if not courted, by the European and even Asian Socialist camps.” Mocking his own role, he observes that “The prospect of an early retreat of the Americans from South Vietnam plunges all the friends of the US into fear—except Cambodia, of course, which will know how to fall before Communism with its customary poise and dignity.”<sup>6</sup>

—sets forth a somewhat overdrawn rationale to prove that America cannot afford to withdraw from Asia, and that in a sense the “hawks” in the US are more correct than the “doves.” (In the process, he makes the telling point that America’s Asian allies cannot compensate for a withdrawal of American power by turning toward the Communists, because—like a bird before a serpent—“the bird, gentle or not, always ends by being swallowed up.”)

Sihanouk concludes, in effect, with a ringing endorsement of the Nixon Doctrine. His language is worth quoting at length: “It is possible and even probable that the new Nixon Doctrine which foresees not having American troops intervene . . .<sup>7</sup> may enter into effect. . . But, they (the Americans) will be obliged in their own interest to support the popular nationalists in their resistance against the new imperialism, that of Asiatic Communism. . . If the US brings *aid without conditions and without physical intervention*, . . . they will certainly have more

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<sup>4</sup> Nixon wrote next to this paragraph: “OK. Do anything like this—which may give us more running room there.”

<sup>5</sup> Tab B is an attached copy of airgram A-10 from Phnom Penh, January 20, which contained a translation of Sihanouk’s editorial, “Cambodia After the War in Vietnam,” published in the December 1969 edition of *Sangkum*.

<sup>6</sup> Nixon wrote on the summary of the Sihanouk editorial: “K—I wonder whether Mansfield has seen this? If not see that he does.” On February 23 Kissinger sent Mansfield a translation of Sihanouk’s article. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. II, September 1969–April 1970)

<sup>7</sup> Nixon underlined this phrase and wrote: “K—I favor this strongly on an urgent basis. We need some leverage on him [Sihanouk]—even Mansfield would support it.”

hope of seeing the flood of Communism contained than if they assume this task with their own soldiers. In effect, they would thus contribute to cutting the wings from the subversive propaganda of Communism, which calls the nation to rebellion, and to the 'liberation of the nation' when the region is 'occupied' by foreign forces. . . . Independence is the dearest thing to the hearts of Asians. . . . The physical assistance of the US to the non-Communist nations only hastens their Communization. On the contrary, an *unconditional* material aid without the physical presence of the USA *would multiply* the efficacy of the resistance of those peoples. . . . One does not conquer Communism with bayonets, but one can conquer it with those weapons which are the well-being of the people and with social justice."

This is not only an endorsement of your policy, it is an unabashed pitch for aid.

We may or may not find it in our interest to find means to aid Cambodia at this juncture—and the prospect of a Congressional debate on such aid is not attractive. However, the mere fact that Sihanouk had sought a resumption of American aid, and that we had accommodated him, would have considerable impact in Southeast Asia.

I have asked State to provide an evaluation of the pros and cons of discreetly sounding out the Cambodians as to their interest in limited US economic or military assistance.

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**180. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Under Secretary of State (Richardson)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, February 12, 1970.

SUBJECT

Aid to Cambodia

Prince Sihanouk's article on the US in the December *Sangkum* has every appearance of being a very thinly-disguised request for US

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, DEF 19 US–CAMB. Top Secret; Sensitive. A copy was sent to Packard.

assistance,<sup>2</sup> made more palatable by his gratuitous defense of a US presence in Southeast Asia and of the Nixon Doctrine, and by his references to “Asiatic Communism”.

I should appreciate it if the Department of State would prepare for the President’s consideration an evaluation of the pros and cons of a U.S. initiative to explore whether Cambodia is seriously interested in seeking a resumption of the aid relationship, and what if any Cambodia’s specific requirements are.

There are of course serious factors militating against a US initiative in that direction, including budgetary stringency and the very difficulties which would be generated by a Congressional debate on Cambodia, plus the question whether an increased US role might increase Communist pressures. On the plus side, there would be the impact in Asia of this change in Sihanouk’s attitude and of our willingness to help him; aid might also be justified if it would avert a threat to Cambodia’s present stability.

I assume that any program would be a very modest one.

I would appreciate it if your evaluation would incorporate an examination of the types of economic or military aid which would be appropriate and the channels through which it might be offered.

This evaluation should be prepared by February 23.<sup>3</sup>

**Henry A. Kissinger**

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<sup>2</sup> See Document 181.

<sup>3</sup> On February 23 Richardson sent the President a memorandum as requested. The summary reads: “On balance, an offer of U.S. economic or military aid to Cambodia would be premature at the present time and could possibly create additional difficulties in U.S.-Cambodian relations. Sihanouk and his government may be gradually shifting their position to make resumption of American aid possible in a post-Viet-Nam context, but we do not believe that the Cambodians expect such an offer now. When such aid becomes appropriate, it should be channeled through multilateral or regional agencies. The Special Funds of the Asian Development Bank could be a particularly suitable means.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. II, September 1969 to 9 April 1970) This memorandum was not sent to the President and the following note appears on the top of the first page: “OBE’d per Grant [Lindsey Grant of the NSC staff] 4/22.”

181. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, February 12, 1970.

SUBJECT

Current Hanoi Intentions In Laos

My staff has developed the following estimate of current North Vietnamese intentions in Laos:

*Military:* The Communists will certainly try to retake the Plain of Jars, whose recent capture by General Vang Pao's Meo Forces they considered an incursion into "their" territory. They may also try to move against Van Vieng, the headquarters of Premier Souvanna Phouma's neutralist forces, so as to install their own "neutralists" there. They may even try to move close to the royal capital Luang Prabang and perhaps Vientiane to increase their pressure on the King and the Lao Government. We doubt that they would make a massive push to the Mekong River, which would involve too high a political risk and probably also too high a military price.

An important Communist objective, beyond territorial gains, is to crush the Meo Forces or at least to inflict such staggering losses that the Meo can be disregarded as a military factor for a long time. Hanoi also wants to punish the Meo enough so that they will not again presume to venture into Communist-held areas. With the Meo out of the military picture, and the pro-Souvanna neutralists also nullified, Souvanna's military strength would be greatly eroded.

The timing of the Communist offensive is still unclear. Their main attack yesterday was against the Xieng Khouang airfield, and may have been intended to prevent the King from landing there as planned. (He instead went to Vang Pao's headquarters.) The Communists also took advantage of low cloud cover which hampered tactical air. Thus we still cannot be sure whether yesterday's action heralded a massive sharp push or whether the Communists will develop their attack over a period of time, in accordance with meteorological and political considerations.

*Political:* Hanoi's principal political purpose is probably to drive a wedge between the U.S. and Souvanna Phouma. If the Meo and the

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<sup>1</sup>Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 546, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. IV, 1 February 1970–31 March 1970. Secret. According to an attached undated note from Haig to Kissinger, Smyser prepared this estimate of North Vietnam's current intention with regard to Laos.

neutralist forces can be badly defeated or even decimated, Souvanna and his government may want very much to reach an accommodation which would save what is left. At that point, Souvanna might be ready to ask for a U.S. bombing halt in the panhandle in exchange for Communist promises to relent. The bombing in southern Laos benefits us more than Souvanna, and the Communists would try to take advantage of that divergence of interests.

Political considerations might help force the Communists to exercise some restraint. If they move too far they might risk a massive U.S. air reaction in Laos and perhaps U.S. military moves in Thailand. This would tend to make Souvanna more dependent on us and might encourage him to hold on.

*Negotiations Front:* We do not believe the Communists now want to negotiate a new agreement on Laos. They will probably not want a separate Lao accord before Vietnam has been settled. But the Communists may hope that military pressure can persuade Souvanna to accept some "understanding" under which the Communist hold on the Lao Government structure would be increased without revising the 1962 Geneva Accords.

With regard to the United States, Communist actions would be intended to warn us that we cannot get peace in Southeast Asia without dealing with Hanoi. Even though Vietnamization may ease our problems in Vietnam, it cannot help us in Laos.

*Problems for Hanoi:* All this is not so simple as it sounds. There is evidence that even the North Vietnamese forces in Laos, which used to sweep up the battlefield against Government forces whenever they entered into action, are not quite what they used to be. (This is also true in South Vietnam.) They are younger, less well trained, and less well led. Recent reports indicate that some units were very demoralized by tactical air raids against their positions. General Vang Pao's Meo Forces are tried but tough. This does not mean that Hanoi cannot achieve many and perhaps all its military objectives. But the action may well not be as easy as they would wish, particularly if the weather permits a sustained tactical air effort in support of Vang Pao.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In a February 12 memorandum to the President, Kissinger responded to Nixon's request for a report on air drops of food and material in Laos. Kissinger summarized two attached papers by CIA on "Food Drops in Laos" and "Air America Operations in Laos." Nixon wrote the following comment on the summary of Air America Operations: "K. Sounds like a good operation—unless the amount of good is less than the obviously very heavy cost of the program." (Ibid.)

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**182. Memorandum for the 40 Committee<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, February 12, 1970.

## SUBJECT

Periodic Report on the National Social Democratic Front

1. *Summary*

This is the fourth report in response to the Committee's request for periodic progress reports on the development of the National Social Democratic Front (NSDF), a South Vietnamese political front under the leadership of President Nguyen Van Thieu. It covers the period 1 October–31 December 1969.

The NSDF made little progress during the reporting period, and one of the six original member parties withdrew.<sup>2</sup> The remaining five parties continue to demonstrate little interest in common programs. On Thieu's recommendation, the Front has abandoned the goal of establishing NSDF organizations in the provinces in favor of building up the separate parties. A special NSDF electoral commission has been set up to develop plans for the 1970/71 provincial and national elections. President Thieu has commenced paying a monthly subsidy directly to each member party and this and certain other overtures by Thieu have helped to ease the earlier strained relations between the President and the party leaders. For the future, Thieu will probably continue to give the Front occasional attention but devote most of his efforts to his domestic programs and to developing his governmental apparatus as a political vehicle. All funds previously authorized for President Thieu's

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Security Council, Nixon Intelligence Files, Subject Files, Vietnam, 1970. Secret; Eyes Only.

<sup>2</sup> In backchannel message 681 from Saigon, January 28, Bunker informed Kissinger that he had recommended on January 26 continued U.S. covert assistance to Thieu's National Social Democratic Front (NSDF) for the next 6 months at the level of [*text not declassified*] per month. Bunker appreciated "that there is some discouragement in Washington with the NSDF" and that he and Thieu shared that disappointment. Since Thieu considered himself the leader of the NSDF, Bunker maintained that Thieu's image would be damaged if the front disintegrated for lack of money. Bunker observed that the front was only 8 months old, and there was little tradition in South Vietnam of "free popular political parties." The NSDF was playing a "catalytic role" in developing democratic political institutions in Vietnam. Bunker asked Kissinger to focus on this issue in 303 Committee consideration, suggesting that the NSDF was a "delicate plant which needs tender care if it is to have a chance to mature and bloom in the historically non-fertile soil of Vietnamese politics." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 410, Backchannel Messages, Southeast Asia, 1970)



political mobilization efforts have been passed to him. This report was concurred in by Ambassador Bunker on 26 January 1970.<sup>3</sup>

[Omitted here is the remainder of the report.]

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<sup>3</sup> On February 25 the 40 Committee discussed extending the program of support of the NSDF. Johnson suggested that Thieu's campaign against dissident Assemblyman Tran Ngoc Chau changed the situation and raised the danger that Thieu would use the support to "buy votes in the legislature in support of his case against Chau." After a long discussion, Attorney General Mitchell convinced the Committee to approve the extension provided that Bunker and the Department of State agreed on pressure and leverage to be brought on Thieu to modify his actions against Chau. The final decision on whether to grant or withhold the assistance would be Bunker's. (National Security Council, 303/40 Committee Records, Minutes, 1970) On March 16 Bunker reported in backchannel message 1134 from Saigon that "I am convinced that the funds we have given Thieu in the past have not wound up in Nguyen Cao Thang's pocket for bribes," but went to the Lien Minh. Bunker requested that he be authorized to start passing the [text not declassified] to Thieu. (Ibid., Subject Files, Vietnam, 1970) The passage of funds was authorized according to later records of the 303/40 Committee.

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### 183. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, undated.

#### SUBJECT

B-52's in Laos

You will recall Ambassador Godley's request in late January to use B-52's against North Vietnamese troops massing east of the Plain of Jars, preparatory to attacking the Plain.<sup>2</sup> The decision at that time was not to use B-52's, largely at the urging of State which argued:

- (a) that North Vietnamese intentions were still unclear;
- (b) that it would represent escalation, and
- (c) that it should be reserved for after the offensive has started.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 102, Vietnam Subject Files, B-52 Strikes in Laos. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for action. This memorandum was discussed at a meeting on February 16; see Document 184.

<sup>2</sup> Godley made the request in telegram 557 from Vientiane, January 23. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 LAOS)

<sup>3</sup> In a January 26 memorandum to the President, Rogers argued against the strikes for these and the following additional reasons: such deliberate escalation would detract from efforts to find a peaceful solution in both Vietnam and Laos, it would suggest more

Since then the offensive has started with the North Vietnamese troops' advance across the Plain of Jars.

Ambassador Godley has relayed a formal request from Souvanna, the first of its kind, for B-52 strikes.<sup>4</sup> This request was triggered by the deteriorating situation in the Plain. Since your earlier decision, the North Vietnamese have cleared the supply route to the eastern edge of the Plain, and government guerrillas have been ordered to withdraw from that area. This retreat had been planned, and no major friendly losses have occurred to date, but forward elements are in a dangerous situation. One assault on the guerrillas' main forward base in the Plain was repulsed, but others are expected shortly. Weather in the Plain is unseasonably cloudy and has hampered the use of tactical air. The purpose of B-52 strikes would be to harass Vietnamese supply lines, particularly Route 7.

Ambassador Godley supported Souvanna's request by back channel,<sup>5</sup> but did not comment on his formal request.

Secretary Laird believes that B-52 strikes should go forward at the time that suitable targets can be developed. He raises some question as to whether such targets are presently identified.<sup>6</sup>

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aggressive U.S. posture and undermine the "political track" in Laos, it would imply an open ended commitment in north Laos, it would send the wrong signal to Hanoi forcing the North Vietnamese to escalate, and it would only give a temporary military advantage and not change the fact that North Vietnam could take Laos when they decide it was in their interest. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 102, Vietnam Subject Files, B-52 Strikes in Laos) Nixon wrote the following responses next to the Department of State's arguments above: (a), "no", (b), "yes," and (c), "no."

<sup>4</sup> In telegram 1063 from Vientiane, February 13, Godley reported that he had received the following letter from Souvanna on February 12: "I have the honor to inform you that the situation on the PDJ has become more serious as of today. The arrival of fresh NVA troops testify to this. As the action of ordinary attack aircraft has been insufficient, I ask you to consider the utilization of B-52 bombers during enemy offensive. I would be grateful if you would intervene with Washington in this sense." (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 LAOS)

<sup>5</sup> In backchannel message 1211044Z, February 12, Godley described the course of the battle and stated that there were two lucrative targets for B-52s. If the targets were attacked by B-52s, Godley suggested that it "might well contribute appreciably delaying further enemy advance into the PDJ." He added that while "Tacair [tactical aircraft] is doing a superb job, now may be time for the Sunday punch." (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 546, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. IV, 1 February 1970-31 March 1970)

<sup>6</sup> In backchannel message 140241Z to Rogers, February 14, Laird informed Rogers (who was in Nairobi) that: "It is possible that targets which are susceptible to B-52 strikes may develop in the next few days. If such targets, i.e., mass or area targets, do develop, I intend to authorize appropriate strikes." (Ibid.)

Admiral Moorer, Acting Chairman of the JCS, proposes that we go ahead with blanket authorization for B-52 strikes for a two-week period, and that suitable targets be hit as they are developed.<sup>7</sup>

Secretary Rogers has taken a very strong stand against the use of B-52's at the present time. He points to the continuing availability of tactical air to support the guerrillas and urges that you consult with Messrs. Richardson and Packard before making a decision.<sup>8</sup>

Arguments favoring the immediate use of B-52's are these:

- (a) B-52's can do more against lines of communications than tactical air, particularly if the cloudy weather continues;
- (b) the greater damage we can do now to NVA logistics, the less momentum they will have to go beyond the Plain this dry season, or to whittle down guerrilla forces which are the only really effective troops on our side;
- (c) the psychological boost to the guerrillas and the RLG, and
- (d) most importantly, the psychological effect on Hanoi. At this point, the Vietnam outcome may depend on Hanoi's estimate of your resolution.

Arguments against are these:

- (a) Congress and the press are watching closely (and have been inquiring regularly at Defense and State), and a major domestic Donnybrook is to be expected if decision is made to use B-52's;
- (b) The RLG knows it cannot expect to hold the Plain; we have forewarned them to have retreat lines prepared, and believe they have done so; the real psychological crisis will come if the NVA goes beyond the Plain;
- (c) the use of B-52's will tend to undercut efforts we have been making to signal to the North Vietnamese our willingness to stick to 1962 lines of territorial control, and
- (d) the use of B-52's now will deprive us of a useful signal which we could use later if the NVA goes beyond the 1962 informal lines and it could encourage the RLG to fight disastrously to hold the Plain, which was in Communist hands from 1961 until last summer.

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<sup>7</sup> Moore's advice has not been found.

<sup>8</sup> In backchannel message 141040Z from Nairobi to Laird, February 14, Rogers stated that the "military utility of the strikes is questionable and the political liabilities are clear." Rogers recalled that the President had assured him that no decision would be taken until the President met with Rogers and Laird. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 LAOS) In backchannel message 142500Z, February 14, Laird stated that, "Consideration should be given to the immediate objectives of keeping enough stability in the north Laos situation to preclude the North Vietnamese from using the situation there (north Laos) from becoming available bargaining point against our interdiction in southern Laos." Laird concluded that "while the distinction between B-52's and massive tactical air strikes is not always clear," there are occasional targets which are more adaptable to B-52s. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 102, Vietnam Subject Files, B-52 Strikes in Laos)

*Recommendation:*<sup>9</sup>

A. To temporize with Souvanna, explaining that targets and timing are not yet appropriate to play the B-52 card, but that we are seriously considering their use if the NVA appears intent on going beyond the 1962 lines of territorial control;

B. That, at the meeting on Monday you authorize B-52 strikes as suitable targets are developed *if* the enemy goes beyond Muong Soui, west of the Plain, or a major effort is made to destroy the principal Meo stronghold at Long Tieng.

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<sup>9</sup> The President did not check either option, but for the decision, see Document 184.

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**184. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, February 16, 1970.

SUBJECT

Talking Points for Your Meeting on Laos

There is a meeting on Laos scheduled for 3:30 p.m. Monday. Attendees will be Secretary Laird, Acting Secretary of State Richardson, Director of CIA Helms, Admiral Moorer and me.<sup>2</sup>

*The Situation*

Vang Pao's Meo forces on the Plain of Jars are under heavy North Vietnamese pressure and have given up most of the high ground to the east which dominates the approaches to the Plain. A number of Meo outposts have been overrun. The airfield at Xieng Khouang has been under sporadic harassing fire, but is still usable for helicopters and light aircraft. Enemy forces are well concentrated east and north-east of the Plain, but are well enough dispersed and dug in to make tacair strikes difficult. I have asked Secretary Laird to have the Chairman prepared to offer a short briefing on the strategic situation as of

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 546, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. IV, 1 February 1970–31 March 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive.

<sup>2</sup> The meeting was held from 3:37 to 4:51 p.m. with the above mentioned persons attending. (Ibid., White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) No memorandum of conversation of this meeting has been found.

today. The Director of CIA is also prepared to present a brief review of the current tactical situation.

*Departmental and Agency Positions on B-52 Strikes*

—*Defense*: Secretary Laird last week declined requests from Ambassador Godley for B-52 strikes, but now believes that serious consideration should be given to follow-on requests for both B-52 and tacair strikes in order to prevent Hanoi from using a victory in North Laos as a bargaining point against our interdiction infiltration routes in South Laos. He believes that this could put Vietnamization in jeopardy. The Chairman, JCS supports immediate granting of authority to employ B-52s as targets develop.

—*State*: Secretary Rogers and Acting Secretary Richardson remain opposed to B-52 strikes.

—*CIA*: No formal position has been expressed by CIA regarding the present request for B-52 strikes, but Helms' representative at the WSAG meeting on the last request favored the strikes in order to help preserve Vang Pao's forces. Presumably this position is unchanged.

I suggest the following talking points for your use in the meeting:

*Talking Points*

1. You would like a briefing from Director Helms as to the situation in the Plain of Jars and from Admiral Moorer on the strategic implications of the situation.

2. Should we or should we not undertake the use of B-52s at this stage?

A. You assume that the Communists can take the Plain and go beyond it, no matter what we do, if they are willing to pay the price.

B. You see the following advantages in using B-52s now:

Arguments favoring the immediate use of B-52s are these: (A) B-52s can do more against lines of communication than tactical air, particularly if the cloudy weather continues; (B) the greater damage we can do now to NVA logistics, the less momentum they will have to go beyond the plain this dry season, or to whittle down guerrilla forces which are the only really effective troops on our side; (C) the psychological boost to guerrillas and the RLG; would respond to a specific formal request by Souvanna; (D) the possibility that Hanoi will see the use of B-52s as a threat to introduce new weapons systems if they press too hard, and hence hold back to some extent.

C. You see the following disadvantages:

Arguments against are these: (A) Congress and the press are watching closely (and have been inquiring regularly at Defense and State), and a major domestic donnybrook is to be expected if decision is made to use B-52s; (B) the RLG knows it cannot expect to hold the plain; we have forewarned them to have retreat lines prepared, and be-

lieve they have done so; the real psychological crisis will come if the NVA goes beyond the plain; (C) the use of B-52s will tend to undercut efforts we have been making to signal to the North Vietnamese our willingness to stick to 1962 lines of territorial control; (D) the use of B-52s now will deprive us of a useful signal which we could use later if the NVA goes beyond the 1962 informal lines, and it could encourage the RLG to fight disastrously to hold the plain, which was in Communist hands from 1961 until last summer.

D. The weights we assign to these arguments depend upon some other questions:

—Can the guerrillas fall back without major loss without the use of B-52s? How much difference will B-52s make?

—What is the weather prognosis?

—Can we presently identify lucrative targets which we cannot hit properly with tactical air?

E. Are there any considerations you have left out?

2.a. (If the decision is made to bomb now) Who will be responsible for putting this decision into effect? What specific ground rules should we establish?

2.b. (If decision is made to defer their use) What criteria should we establish for reconsideration of the decision?

You suggest that we should anticipate the use of B-52s

—*if* the Communists begin to move across the informal “lines of control” of 1962 (such as proceeding beyond Muong Soui),<sup>3</sup>

—*or if* they undertake an attrition campaign to wipe out the Meo guerrillas in their home area (Long Tieng, Sam Thong),

—*and if* suitable targets appear.

3. How should we insure that we stay up-to-date on the target situation?

You suggest that reconnaissance be conducted as necessary, commencing forthwith, including further B-52 reconnaissance, and you want *daily* reports on this situation starting immediately.

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<sup>3</sup> Kissinger recalls in *White House Years* that Nixon agreed that if the North Vietnamese moved beyond Muong Soui, the attacks should be undertaken. (pp. 452–453) On February 17 Admiral Moorer informed McCain that authorization for a one-time B-52 strike on the Plain of Jars had been authorized and he ordered execution. (JCS telegram 02490 to McCain, Abrams, and Godley, February 17; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 102, Vietnam Subject Files, B-52 Strikes in Laos) In backchannel message 574 from Vientiane, February 17, Godley reported that he informed Souvanna of the decision and reiterated that it was a “one shot operation.” Souvanna suggested that the strikes should be denied no matter what the North Vietnamese charged, noting that Hanoi always denied its personnel and military operations in Laos. Godley hoped there would be no leaks and recommended that the U.S. Government continue its policy of not commenting on air operations in Laos. (Ibid.)

4. Who will see that the matter comes up to you for decision when the criteria have been met?

You suggest that Secretary Laird send you a memorandum, through Henry Kissinger, when he believes that the criteria have been met. Kissinger will then inform the Secretary of State that the recommendation has been made and will obtain State views prior to your decision.

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### 185. Memorandum for Record<sup>1</sup>

Paris, February 17, 1970.

On February 12, 1970, I received telephonic instructions from Brig Gen Haig to contact Mai Van Bo and to tell him that I would be leaving Paris around February 20th and that Dr. Kissinger would be willing to meet with his visitor (Le Duc Tho) if latter were still here.<sup>2</sup> I called the General Delegation of North Vietnam and asked to speak to Mai Van Bo. The Vietnamese girl who answered asked who was calling and I told her. In a moment she said she would take the message. I told her that I would be leaving Paris around the end of the forthcoming week. That was all I told her. That evening at my home she called back and said that the Delegate General would receive me on Monday February 16, 1970, at 1730.

On that date and at that time I went to the DRVN house at 78 rue Jules Lagaisse in Choisy-le-Roi. I was cordially received by Mai Van Bo who took out of his pocket a piece of paper and read it to me. I copied it down in French and at the end read it back to him. He agreed that it was an exact copy of what he had read to me.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 106, Kissinger Office Files, Country Files, East Asia, Vietnam, "S" Mister, Vol. 2. No classification marking. Drafted by Walters.

<sup>2</sup> According to an unattributed memorandum for the record, February 16, Walters called the White House at 1:05 p.m. that day to say that he had met with Mai Van Bo who told him that Xuan Thuy and "their visitor" [Le Duc Tho], if he was still in Paris, would like to meet privately with Kissinger in Paris on February 20 or 21. According to this memorandum, Walters reported that "he was given tea, treated amiably and that the other side hoped that the U.S. would make some conciliatory moves which could get the negotiations off dead center." Mai Van Bo added he was working on his English because the "world is changing and he may be, in the future, working on our side." (Ibid., Box 852, For the President's File, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. II)

The text is as follows:

“Following the American proposal of 14 January 1970 Minister Xuan Thuy and Delegate General Mai Van Bo would be willing to meet with Mr. Henry Kissinger on the 20th or 21st of February at 11 rue Darthé in Choisy-le-Roi.

“We continue to feel that the United States should adopt an attitude of understanding and realism and should offer new and reasonable proposals, if they are really desirous of achieving a peaceful solution to the Vietnamese problem and advancing the negotiations.” End text.<sup>3</sup>

Mai Van Bo then said that this offer had been made as they believed that Dr. Kissinger would prefer to come on a weekend. I then said that if their visitor was still here, Dr. Kissinger would be willing to meet with him. Mai Van Bo hesitated for a minute and then said that he did not know whether Le Duc Tho would still be here but if he were, he would take part in the meeting.

Tea was then served and I said something about a Vietnamese poster on the wall. Mai Van Bo asked me if I was studying Vietnamese and I said I was. He said that he was also trying to study English.<sup>4</sup> Our countries would not always be at war and he might some day go to the United States. He said his people were fighting for what they thought was right and had taken a greater tonnage of bombs than any other people. I said that no one could challenge the courage of the Vietnamese people. As a soldier I took off my hat to them but we too were fighting for what we thought was right. My country four times this century had poured forth its blood for what it thought was right. He shook hands and poured me another cup of tea. I asked him what the proposed location was. He said it was a house they used. It was discreet and it was here that they had received Governor Harriman for his private meetings with them.

We had a brief non-political discussion on the Vietnamese, Chinese and Japanese languages and I promised to telephone Mai Van Bo an answer as soon as I got one.

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<sup>3</sup> Walters sent the text of the Mai Van Bo démarche to Haig in a telegram on February 16. (Ibid.) Walters recounts that he had a special code to communicate with the White House about meeting with North Vietnamese representatives and that he had to do the encoding and decoding himself. He also recalls that Kissinger enjoined him to tell no one in the Embassy or the Department of Defense about these arrangements. (Vernon Walters, *Silent Missions*, p. 510)

<sup>4</sup> On February 16 at 9:05 p.m., Kissinger and the President discussed this meeting between Walters and Mai Van Bo. Kissinger stated that he “had the feeling they were in a much different mood than any time we had seen them previously. One of the North Vietnamese said he is learning English because the world is changing and he may one day be working for the Americans. They have never talked this way before. I [still?] don’t think much will come out of it.” Nixon responded: “Well, you have always said nothing will come of the first meeting, but if you just stake it out you may get a nibble.” (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 362, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)



**186. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, February 17, 1970.

SUBJECT

Covert Operations in North Vietnam

Attached is a report from Dick Helms of the results of preliminary research on potential targets for covert operations in North Vietnam.<sup>2</sup> You had previously authorized CIA to conduct covert operations against two targets within 30 miles of the Laotian border. Helms reports, *inter alia*, that:

—the most vital targets are located in the urban areas of Hanoi and Haiphong but significant action against these targets is not within current covert capability.

—because the North Vietnamese have been slow to repair damaged facilities it is difficult to locate significant targets below the 20th parallel.

—thus far only two additional appropriate targets have been identified, both petroleum storage facilities, which are near enough for overland infiltration from Laos or South Vietnam.

—CIA has the capability for operations from Laos into North Vietnam up to a depth of 30 kilometers. Because DOD controls the principal assets for operations from South Vietnam into North Vietnam, Defense should be charged with responsibility for targetting and development of operations for the rest of North Vietnam.

—CIA has identified four potential targets which would be accessible from the coast.

You may recall that in your meeting with Secretary Laird and General Wheeler prior to their departure for Vietnam,<sup>3</sup> you asked them to look into the possibility of covert raids against targets along the east coast of North Vietnam. I will include a talking point for your Tuesday meeting with them in case you want to:

—ask for an analysis, based on their trip, of the feasibility of initiating covert operations along the east coast of North Vietnam.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 143, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, February 1–18, 1970. Secret; Sensitive.

<sup>2</sup> Attached but not printed is a memorandum from Helms to Kissinger, February 6.

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2, Document 187.

—ask them if they agree with CIA’s recommended division of labor for covert operations in North Vietnam.

—inform them that CIA has identified four potential coastal targets.

*Recommendation*<sup>4</sup>

If Secretary Laird raises no objection, that you authorize the following division of labor for covert operations:

—CIA charged with targetting and development of operations from Laos into North Vietnam up to a depth of 30 kilometers from the border.

—the Department of Defense charged with responsibility for targetting and development of operations for the rest of North Vietnam.

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<sup>4</sup> Nixon initialed the approve option.

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**187. Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, February 17, 1970.

SUBJECT

Trip to Vietnam and CINCPAC, February 10–14, 1970<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 224, Agency Files, DOD, Vol. IV, 1 February 1970–20 April 1970. Secret; Sensitive. Nixon wrote the following note at the top of the page: “K[issinger]—an excellent report. Note RN’s notes.”

<sup>2</sup> Prior to this trip, Laird and Wheeler met with the President and Kissinger from 5:05 p.m. to approximately 6:30 p.m. on February 8 to discuss the trip and related issues. (Ibid., White House Central Files, President’s Daily Diary) No memorandum of conversation of this meeting has been found, but Kissinger prepared a briefing memorandum for the President prior to the meeting. (Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, February 7; *ibid.*, NSC Files, Box 105, Vietnam Subject Files, [Operating Authorities and Air Operations]) After the trip Nixon met with Laird from 10:51 a.m. to 12:03 p.m. on February 17. (Ibid., White House Central Files, President’s Daily Diary) No memorandum of conversation of this meeting has been found, but Kissinger prepared a briefing memorandum for the President prior to the meeting with Laird. (Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, February 16; *ibid.*, NSC Files, Box 143, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, February 1–18, 1970)

Last March, I made the first trip by any member of the new Administration to South Vietnam.<sup>3</sup> Since that time, I have devoted a major part of my time to the situation we face there. Not only have I adjusted the Defense organization to concentrate more directly and forcefully on the Vietnam problem, but I have also asked numerous senior Defense officials such as the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Service Secretaries, the Chiefs of Staff, and Assistant Secretaries to visit South Vietnam and study our problems there directly.

Consistent with the concerted attention to Southeast Asia, General Wheeler and I have, at your direction, just completed a four day trip to Vietnam. Three days were spent in consultation with Ambassador Bunker and his colleagues; General Abrams and his staff; and South Vietnam leaders, including President Thieu, Vice President Ky, Prime Minister Khiem, and Defense Minister Vy.<sup>4</sup> In the field, I briefly saw Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) units, and evidence of the progress being made on pacification. Finally, I spent a day at CINCPAC Headquarters in Hawaii, discussing with Admiral McCain the current status of affairs throughout the Pacific region.

In this report, I shall make, first, some general observations. Thereafter, I shall review in somewhat more detail:

- a. The current military assessment.
- b. The status of the military aspects of Vietnamization.
- c. The status of the non-military aspects of Vietnamization, especially the economic issues, as they affect both the United States and the Republic of Vietnam.
- d. Progress in joint planning among the Free World Forces in South Vietnam, to include military contingencies and planning for the Paris negotiations, and,
- e. The prospects for continuing US troop redeployments.

Finally, I shall draw some conclusions and make some recommendations.

#### *General Observations*

When I reported to you last March, I suggested that that trip constituted a beginning. Both symbolically and practically, it was the beginning of new efforts, to come to grips with the complexities and practicalities of the Southeast Asia conflict. The essential purpose of the first trip was to determine, consistent with our manifold national interests, how we could achieve our objectives in Southeast Asia. A key purpose of the recent trip was to see if our objectives in South Vietnam still ap-

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<sup>3</sup> For the report of that trip, see Document 38.

<sup>4</sup> Memoranda of Laird's conversations with these Vietnamese officials on February 12 are in the National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27 VIET S.

pear valid and if our strategy, programs, and schedules are tailored correctly to meet those objectives. I wanted to see, too, what specific tasks remain before us. While the progress made in the military aspects of Vietnamization is impressive, the work remaining is of monumental proportions. Furthermore, there are other aspects of the general situation and of our involvement which have not been well defined. I have in mind, especially, the economic issues and the planning for new initiatives in Paris. Despite the impressive gains made in Vietnamization this past year, we have, in some respects, barely started down the new course towards our objectives.

That we have so much work remaining should detract in no way from the outstanding jobs Ambassador Bunker, General Abrams and the South Vietnamese have done so far. The enormity of the remaining job is rather a reflection of the scope and depth not only of the communist threat but also of the US involvement over the past few years.

This trip confirmed for me again that we are pursuing a proper and valuable objective in pressing for self-determination in South Vietnam. The uniform view of the US civilian and military leaders in Vietnam and of the GVN leadership is that we are on a proper course towards that objective.

The best characterization of the atmosphere among top US and GVN officials in South Vietnam is one of cautious optimism. I was told on this visit, just as last March, that we now have and can retain sufficient strength to keep the enemy from achieving any kind of military verdict in South Vietnam. I was also told the South Vietnamese were making satisfactory progress in Vietnamization, especially on the military front. All indicators tend to confirm these judgments.

That, in essence, is what the US and GVN leadership in South Vietnam conveyed to me. What I attempted to convey to them was, in my judgment, likewise important. I emphasized the major constraint on US involvement was now economic. Last year, the principal constraint was diminishing US public support. I assured the people with whom I talked US public support is still vital and should not be taken for granted. But, the actual and prospective diminished US funds available for national security are consistently narrowing our operational latitude in Southeast Asia. Comprehension of that problem is vital to continued progress in Vietnamization. I emphasized the key factor, if we are to (a) operate within the resources available and (b) sustain the support of the American people, is to continue shifting the burden of military combat to the South Vietnamese. The fiscal situation provides an incentive and reinforcement to the Vietnamization policy. It also introduces a new element of risk.

I also emphasized the importance of sound joint planning in all aspects of Vietnamization; of insuring the best possible preparation and

use of our negotiating posture in Paris; and of continuing concern for the security of our remaining forces in South Vietnam. All of these facets, I stressed, must be given attention and integrated into the apparatus and policies by which we continue towards our overall objectives. The situation in Vietnam therefore, continues to present a challenge, the dimensions of which are not readily comprehended.

*The Current Military Assessments*

A continual decline in the intensity of enemy activity occurred, as you know, during 1969. Enemy combat activity continues to be relatively moderate, or even light, in comparison with the experience of 1968 and early 1969. The overall enemy force levels fell from an estimated strength of 260,000 in September 1969 to about 220,000 in December. From information currently available, it appears the enemy's force levels will continue to decline, at least through the foreseeable future. Furthermore, the composition will continue to shift more and more to a predominantly North Vietnamese force.

The enemy's force accessions through infiltration from North Vietnam and conscription in South Vietnam, continue to be moderate at best. The NVA arrivals in South Vietnam over the next 4–5 months are expected to average about 4,500 men per month. The enemy losses through known combat losses and defections—not to mention the uncertain losses through wounded and illness—continue to run well in excess of those estimated accessions.

Furthermore, the composition of the enemy forces, especially the *combat* element, continues, as indicated, to become more North Vietnamese. According to MACV data, the following is the shift in *combat* strength proportions:

	<i>Oct 1965</i>	<i>Jan 1970</i>
NVA	26%	72%
VC	<u>74</u>	<u>28</u>
	100%	100%

The conflict is increasingly a North Vietnamese effort on the enemy's part.

Despite the manpower trends cited, General Abrams and his staff believe the enemy is developing the capability to step up the level of combat activity. The most significant indicator of the enemy's intentions is the sharp increase in the level of his logistic activities. The North Vietnamese started to push supplies through the Laotian panhandle earlier during the current dry season than usual. The supply effort has been unprecedented in numerous other respects. These include the volume of traffic, the intensive work on diversifying and keeping open the Lines of Communication (LOCs), and the efforts to protect the LOCs

against air attack. It is difficult to draw precise conclusions from such activity, but it may reflect:

- a. The need to replace large caches lost or destroyed last year in South Vietnam.
- b. The need to make larger inputs into the supply system to overcome major losses to US air interdiction.
- c. The increasing difficulty in moving supplies through Cambodia.
- d. The need to complete supply movements before the rainy season begins in April or May.
- e. The intention to stockpile adequate supplies for any tactical opportunities which may arise in South Vietnam.

Against the enemy logistics effort, our naval and air elements continue to exert strong pressure. The Navy has erected effective interdiction barriers between Cambodia and the South Vietnamese Delta region. The air components are exerting strong and increasing pressure against the enemy's logistic operations in Laos, as exemplified by the following record:

	<i>US Air Operations in South Laos</i>		
	<i>Oct 1969</i>	<i>Nov 1969</i>	<i>Dec 1969</i>
Attack Sorties	5,421	8,555	10,201
B52 Sorties	358	569	619
Total	5,779	9,124	10,820

In General Abrams' and President Thieu's judgment, the enemy may be expected to look for appropriate "targets of opportunity" in South Vietnam. The massive logistics effort, therefore, does not necessarily portend intensive or widespread military operations in the near future. The logistics push simply gives the enemy the capability to initiate action, if and when he chooses to do so.

The enemy has probably not yet decided, General Abrams believes, where or when to institute combat operations. Most of the enemy units are below strength and are not capable now of any major or sustained effort. General Abrams is uncertain about the enemy's reasons for waiting, but probably center on prospects for:

- a. A military opportunity in the field,
- b. An exploitable political opportunity, such as riots in Saigon, or
- c. An exploitable opportunity in the Paris negotiations.

The two geographical areas in which enemy activity is most feasible are the Delta and the DMZ. Consistent with the general conclusion that adequate friendly forces are available, General Abrams believes any prospective confrontation in either of these two critical regions is likewise manageable. In the Delta, MACV feels the distribution of RVNAF/US forces is "ideal." In the DMZ area, our major

reserve is air power. Our resources would be readily concentrated, I was told, to squelch any prospective threat.

Of potentially special importance to the war in South Vietnam is the current enemy activity in Northern Laos. I inquired of General Abrams and his Air Force Commanders why so many attack sorties were being flown in Northern Laos when the enemy was pressing so hard to move supplies through the Southern Laotian panhandle towards South Vietnam. In November and December 1969, for example, more than 3,000 sorties per month were flown in North Laos. If those sorties had been redirected to Southern Laos, our interdiction sortie level could have been increased by as much as 30–40 percent.

General Abrams indicated hard choices are involved in making sortie applications. He believes, however, the war in Northern Laos could impact decisively on the war in South Vietnam and on the Vietnamization program. If, for example, the North Vietnamese were to put sufficient pressure on the Royal Laotian Government in North Laos to cause it to be willing to ask for a cessation of all US air operations in Laos, the North Vietnamese would be provided a major new advantage in threatening the South Vietnamese borders. That situation could radically affect, according to General Abrams' reasoning, the pace and even viability of Vietnamization. I believe we should urgently reassess our general policy vis-à-vis the entire Laotian situation.

*Status of Vietnamization from the Military Viewpoint*

You made two exceedingly important observations in your November 3, 1969, speech.<sup>5</sup> Those points were:

- a. We have a program to Vietnamize the war.
- b. The program is working.

Perhaps the most telling report I can make as a result of my trip is that your November 3 observations are still accurate. I was impressed and gratified with the positive attitude towards the policy. Our leaders talk of the program enthusiastically and point with pride to the South Vietnamese accomplishments in the field. This is an area where figures and physical accomplishment speak loudly. We shall have reduced our authorized forces by 115,500 men by mid-April. Simultaneously, the security in South Vietnam, measured by every available indicator, is improving. That is testimony to the success, to date, of our Vietnamization policy and program.

Of special importance in this regard is the hearty endorsement of the concept by the GVN leadership. President Thieu, Vice President Ky,

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<sup>5</sup> For text, see *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pp. 901–909.

Prime Minister Khiem and Minister of Defense Vy discussed Vietnamization with enthusiasm and pride. As Ambassador Bunker has reported to you, President Thieu has succeeded in selling the concept as something the Vietnamese want, rather than as something pressed on them by the United States. Though the origins of President Thieu's convictions are vague, he has volunteered, without prompting by US officials, his government's determination that the bulk of US combat forces should be replaced in 1970.

The view in Saigon is that the dilemma for Hanoi must be severe. If the enemy waits to test Vietnamization in the field, he stands to lose ground, both militarily and politically. If he tests Vietnamization in the foreseeable future, he stands to take massive military losses. The best the enemy can hope for, therefore, is some localized and short-term tactical military success.

If the NVA/VC were to achieve such a success, e.g., by overrunning and occupying temporarily a village or town or by inflicting sizeable losses on a South Vietnamese unit, the enemy might then seize the opportunity (a) to claim Vietnamization had failed and/or (b) to make a dramatic overture in Paris for something like a localized or even general cease-fire. This potential sequence of events is the one most frequently talked about in South Vietnam. It seems to be the option given most credibility by US and GVN leaders. Strangely enough, it is an option for which little or no planning has been accomplished. I shall discuss that situation later in more detail.

There are other continuing problems, as one would expect, with implementing Vietnamization. The South Vietnamese believe the continued success of Vietnamization depends in large measure on (a) better living standards for the military and their families<sup>6</sup> and (b) more weapons, especially for the People's Self-Defense Forces. Improved living standards would include such items as increased availability and lower prices on food, the access to perquisites such as commissaries, and the availability of adequate dependent shelters or housing. The crucial issue is that virtually all of the elements cited by the South Vietnamese as important to continued Vietnamization progress would, if provided, put serious pressure on either US or SVN resources, or both. In point of fact, neither the US nor the GVN budgets can readily provide the resources requested in the amounts desired. This problem is one to which we and the Mission in Saigon will devote strenuous effort.

The continued success of Vietnamization, in the estimate of US leaders in Vietnam, depends in large measure on the availability of

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<sup>6</sup> Nixon underlined the phrase after (a) and wrote in the margin: "K?"



sound GVN leadership. The problem, in General Abrams' view, evolves not so much around the numbers or rank structure of the leadership, as the quality in a few select positions. General Abrams told me there were 3 or 4 military positions where a change in leadership is required. Conveniently, President Thieu has asked General Abrams for his views and opinions on the leadership problem. This overture has two major pluses, viz, (a) the problem is recognized by the South Vietnamese and (b) we have a good opportunity to make our views known without overriding concern for South Vietnamese sensitivities. General Abrams assured me he will follow through promptly and forcefully on this opportunity.

*Status of Non-Military Aspects of Vietnamization*

A significant portion of the discussions with the MACV and Embassy Staffs was devoted to the budget realities which must be faced. These budget realities affect both the US and the GVN. Obvious emphasis centered on the cuts which were made in the FY 1970 US Defense budget and which are contained in the budget proposals for FY 1971.

I did not sense that there had been a full realization of the impact of these cuts. One aspect of the problem, therefore, is the need for a clear concept of the prospective budget implications. It appears the difference between current MACV desires, including GVN support, and available resources is on the order of \$1 billion. I explained there could be no reliance on supplemental Vietnam appropriations. This left two feasible alternatives, viz, (a) finding ways to use existing resources more effectively, or (b) increasing US redeployments. I emphasized the essentiality of facing these harsh fiscal facts, as the Administration surveyed the total security requirements of our country.

It would no longer be possible, General Wheeler and I noted, to consider Vietnam outlays separately from our world-wide defense needs. Certainly, we acknowledged, Vietnam would continue to hold a high priority. We made the point that the presentation and defense of the budget before Congress was, of course, our assignment and that we did not wish to burden MACV and Embassy Saigon with additional problems. Yet, we felt that a realistic budget assessment by all concerned was essential.

Our conversations with MACV indicate it would be advisable to provide fiscal guidance to the field well in advance of force planning for Vietnamization. As matters now stand, the SVN requests for improvement and modernization, as approved by MACV, price out at considerably more than the amount provided in the FY 1971 budget. The idea is to be sure all those involved in Vietnamization address priorities and tradeoffs to adjust the program to available resources.

It was my feeling that the participants in our budget discussions, whatever their frustration about the budget picture, were pleased that we had laid the facts on the line and had not attempted to avoid the problem. This attitude of candor prevailed throughout. I am not certain that in past years attention was given at such meetings to the fact that Vietnam war costs have such a direct relationship to our total national defense needs, or that difficult tradeoffs are involved.

In the course of our discussions on the budget situation, it became clear that other economic aspects of Vietnamization are fraught with potential hazards. The South Vietnamese economy, in its major parameters, is almost totally supported by the United States. This includes sustenance of war costs, a viable foreign exchange position, keeping price instability within manageable bounds, and maintaining some prospect for economic growth. As part of the war effort, designed to attract popular support to the cause, we have followed a policy of raising the standard of living for the SVN populace rather than imposing a regime of austerity.

A prerequisite for Vietnamizing the economic institutions and apparatus is first and foremost some definition of the problem. If a stable and reliable SVN economy is to be insured, we must obtain a clear picture of:

- a. What the war is costing.
- b. How much of the cost is being borne internally and how much externally.
- c. What costs are valid and what are not.
- d. How the cost and its distribution will change with Vietnamization, and,
- e. How the current and future costs should be funded, both internally and externally.

Such a definition does not now exist. It is a matter of the utmost urgency that we obtain this understanding. The South Vietnamese shall be proceeding in the meantime between the Scylla and Charybdis of potentially destructive economic failure, from phenomena such as hyperinflation, and the equally destructive possibility of military failure because of too few resources to accomplish the security mission. This is a matter to which we and the South Vietnamese must devote immediate and concerted attention. Ambassador Bunker has promised the application to the problem of his Mission staff. I shall insure equally concerted attention by my staff.

In other discussions, we reviewed the actions essential to maintain and strengthen the credibility of the Vietnamization program. All agreed your policy of abstinence from public long-range forecasts has been important. The newsmen in South Vietnam, with whom I met on three separate occasions, continue to be skeptical, if not cynically

pessimistic, about Vietnamization. The problem is that, given such a viewpoint, the media will be disposed to elaborate on and, perhaps distort, any temporary setbacks in the Vietnamization program. I know of no way to handle the situation except to (a) recognize the situation; (b) try to obtain media access to South Vietnamese units so they can see the progress for themselves; (c) continue to ask the Embassy and MACV to convey their message, which they do convincingly, to the many US visitors to South Vietnam; and (d) continue to admonish in every possible public forum that some temporary tactical setbacks to Vietnamization must be expected.

All of these actions are being taken.

Both Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams told us how pleased they were in the confidence you have demonstrated in them and in their staffs. They commented, particularly, on the fact there was a minimum of "crash management" from Washington. The importance of their positive attitude and the aura of mutual confidence cannot be quantified. Neither, in my view, should it be underestimated. We should continue to cultivate it.

In the same vein, I was impressed with Vice President Ky's remarks about working relationships between the US officials and the GVN. As I have reported separately to you, the Vice President said that, for the first time in years, there was true mutual understanding between officials of our two countries. "There exists now," he said, "a real common objective and a real common policy with full understanding between our two nations." Most importantly, Ky concluded, the necessary elements for "bigger and faster progress" in Vietnamization were present.

#### *Status of Joint Planning*

In every discussion I had with our US officials and the GVN leadership, I raised the topic of joint planning. My premise was that, to make Vietnamization meaningful, it was necessary to involve the GVN increasingly. I wanted to know how good our joint planning was and how it could be improved.

I was assured by both General Abrams that from a military standpoint, in both form and substance, joint planning had "advanced tremendously." The military proposals being tabled now in numerous aspects of Vietnamization are emanating from the Vietnamese. In General Abrams' words, "that would have been unthinkable as recently as one year ago."

There are problems, however. One is in the area of contingency planning in the event of significantly increased, albeit localized, enemy activity. General Abrams is confident that any enemy military initiative can be handled. The plan is to use air power as the principal re-

serve resource. I have the impression, however, that because the reserve resources are principally US, the planning ancillary to situations stemming from major enemy initiatives is also largely US. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and I shall monitor this situation.

A more disturbing problem in the joint planning area involves political or negotiating contingencies which may arise. As I indicated earlier, one of the enemy courses of action deemed most likely by both US and GVN leadership is a sharp enemy military move, followed by a Paris initiative involving some cease-fire feature. Surprisingly, little has been done, or is being done, to think through the handling of such a situation—or of similar situations.<sup>7</sup> Ambassador Bunker was candid in rendering this judgment. In fact, he reasoned, Hanoi would be smart to follow the strategy of occupying one or two towns and then appealing for a cease-fire. General Abrams concurred in that conclusion, contending such a tactic would have been prudent for the enemy at various times during and since TET 1968. Ambassador Bunker informed us the GVN Foreign Minister was scheduled to present a paper shortly which might serve as the basis for contingency planning. I believe we must move expeditiously in this area, taking the initiative, if necessary.

Ancillary to the point of initiatives is another bothersome aspect of joint planning. Perhaps the war, and now Vietnamization, have become so routine that new proposals and new initiatives are scarcely feasible. No particularly new or fresh concepts were offered during our visit. I was somewhat surprised and disappointed.<sup>8</sup>

It seems to me new ideas should be generated—not just at the local level in Vietnam where I am certain there is continuing innovation—but in the broad policy areas as well. I elaborated to our officials and the GVN leadership the recently proposed idea of a large-scale NVA prisoner-of-war release.<sup>9</sup> It was an idea that all agreed has merit. There would be little or no probability of Hanoi's acceptance; but the proposal itself, if made, would put Hanoi on the defensive. It would add new pressure on Hanoi to make concessions concerning US and GVN prisoners they hold. It would detract from Hanoi's ability to foment US and world opinion against our policies and programs in Southeast Asia. But the point is not the potential merit in this one idea. Rather, the point is that so few ideas and new concepts of that kind are

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<sup>7</sup> Nixon underlined this sentence and wrote "K" in the margin.

<sup>8</sup> Nixon underlined the two previous sentences and wrote in the margin: "K. Can we shake them up?"

<sup>9</sup> Nixon underlined the phrase, "a large-scale NVA prisoner-of-war release" and wrote in the margin: "K. follow up."

being generated. We must give attention to eliciting, encouraging, and developing fresh new policy and tactical concepts.

A new-concepts area of special significance could be that of guarding against a “wait-and-strike-later” strategy by Hanoi. Faced with the dilemma ascribed to earlier, Hanoi could opt now to lay low, conduct a low-intensity war in South Vietnam, and wait out the US withdrawal. In the wake of that withdrawal, Hanoi might plan to step up its military efforts, seize the initiative, and try to roll up the South Vietnamese forces. The military part of the Vietnamization program is designed to handle such a threat. But there may be other military, political, and economic barriers which would be useful against such an eventuality. Such barriers could be based, for the most part, on involving the national interests of as many other nations as possible in South Vietnam. Among the ideas worthy of consideration might be establishing an international military force along the DMZ and encouraging the earliest possible introduction of foreign capital into public or private ventures in South Vietnam. Confronted with a situation in which renewed attacks would constitute aggression against the military, political, and economic interests of numerous nations, Hanoi might be inhibited in any “wait-and-strike-later” approach.

In any event, these are the kinds of areas in which we should renew our efforts for fresh new initiatives.

#### *Planning for Continued US Redeployments*

There is no doubt in Saigon, among US or GVN officials, that US troop redeployments will continue. There is likewise no doubt that the ultimate goal is for a relatively small military assistance group. The question is one of force composition and timing. The South Vietnamese are perhaps more confident on the potential and feasible redeployment rates than our US leadership. Ambassador Bunker made the point cogently when he reasoned that in terms of ARVN combat power “Vietnamization [has]<sup>10</sup> proceeded more rapidly than US redeployments.”

General Abrams is more cautious. He makes the point that, despite an “entirely satisfactory” current military situation and an RVNAF modernization program that is “moving well,” the next redeployment increment, i.e., number four, will be the “crunch” increment. He argues that RVNAF leadership is still weak in some areas. He also argues that, if military difficulties ensue in the wake of the redeployment announcement or movement, the psychological impact could be severe. Finally, he notes increasing problems in handling the logistics aspects of redeployment.

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<sup>10</sup> Brackets in the source text.

I am not certain I fully understand all of General Abrams' argument about the gravity of the next increment. While contending the RVNAF leadership is weak in some areas, which it almost certainly is, he also noted that perhaps as few as four major leadership positions now need President Thieu's attention. Furthermore, General Abrams made a convincing case for the enemy's inability in the foreseeable future to mount any wide, sustained, or decisive military moves. General Abrams speaks confidently of his ability to use air reserves as an adequate source of reserve power. Presumably, a fourth redeployment increment could be devised which impacted relatively little on that reserve power. Additionally, I have directed a full-scale effort by the logistics staffs at all echelons towards easing the postulated logistics problems. Finally, the GVN leadership spoke with confidence of their ability to fill in behind continuing US redeployments. Ambassador Bunker conveyed to me their confidence is sincere.

Therefore, the prediction the next redeployment increment will be "the crunch," at least to date, is not entirely consistent with all the other observable factors. Nevertheless, there could be an element of self-fulfillment about feelings of uncertainty and potential psychological reactions to the next US troop movements. We shall be advised, I believe, to weigh the timing, force composition, and risks carefully. I am prepared to believe redeployment increment four will be more difficult than the immediately succeeding increments.

Still another element of redeployment planning which must bear close scrutiny is the concept, at least as expressed publicly, of the role of the so-called security force after our main combat elements have departed.

As you know, there is a common, though misguided, feeling that, when our troop strengths have declined to about the 250,000 level, we shall have few or no combat troops left in South Vietnam. That is not the plan nor has it ever been the plan.<sup>11</sup> While major combat elements will have departed by that juncture, the remaining force will be weighted as much as 60 percent with combat troops. They are to provide the security assurance which is absolutely vital for the remaining support elements.

General Abrams makes the valid point, with strong conviction, that such remaining combat elements—called security elements, or whatever—must be free to stay active and aggressive in the field. Without such freedom, they will lose their sharpness. Rather than holding down casualty levels, they will, under such circumstances, be apt to sustain higher casualty levels.

The point is that after our so-called combat elements have redeployed, US units must be free to maintain an active and forceful

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<sup>11</sup> Nixon underlined the previous two sentences and wrote "K" in the margin.

combat posture. The issue may be one of semantics. It is an important concept, however, on which we must have agreement and a common voice.<sup>12</sup> I support General Abrams' view. Our field commanders should be free to use their resources in whatever way will keep US casualties low. We can and perhaps should portray the operations as "protective reaction," i.e., using whatever means are necessary to safeguard our troops properly. In any event, I repeat my conviction we should agree on the concept and present it with a common voice.

Another aspect of redeployment planning and technique which I emphasized consistently was the procedure on redeployment announcements. All the officials with whom I talked, including President Thieu and Vice President Ky, agreed we should *not* make public announcements on Vietnamization schedules more than 4–5 months in advance. The principal reasons are twofold: (a) to create doubt and uncertainty in Hanoi, and (b) to preclude unnecessary risks of credibility problems, especially in the United States.

#### *Conclusions and Recommendations*

1. Our fighting men in Southeast Asia, under the superb leadership of General Abrams, are fully supported and currently have the resources in men, material, and facilities to accomplish their assigned tasks with maximum safety and security. This is the same conclusion I offered last March, have offered consistently since that time, and which I am pleased to repeat now.

2. Steady progress is being made in the application of military and political pressure on the enemy. There is every indication this pressure and progress will continue.

3. The combination of US, Republic of Vietnam, and other Free World forces is adequate to meet the prospective enemy threat. We should, however, reassess the nature of the threat in Laos and the options for dealing with that threat.

4. Our Vietnamization objectives are valid and the military aspects of the program are proceeding satisfactorily. There are serious problems to be faced, however, in finding and allocating the resources now being postulated as the basis for the on-going program. Hard choices will have to be faced and/or new ideas will have to be generated on either getting more from the resources available or accepting the risks associated with faster redeployments.

5. Progress in the non-military aspects of Vietnamization is less positive. Some glaring, and potentially critical, deficiencies exist in such

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<sup>12</sup> Nixon underlined the first three sentences of this paragraph and wrote "Correct" in the margin.

areas as economic planning.<sup>13</sup> We should join with the Vietnamese in attacking this problem with realism and urgency. I shall give the problem my immediate and continuing attention and shall insure that my staff does likewise. Perhaps an interagency economic task force, preferably chaired by the Council of Economic Advisors, should be organized in Washington to coordinate planning and actions in the economic area of Vietnamization.

6. Major progress has been made in the field of joint planning. It continues to progress satisfactorily in the military area. There are major gaps, however, in our planning for contingencies that involve economic issues or prospective political and negotiation initiatives. In concert with State Department officials—in Washington, Saigon, and Paris—and with the GVN leadership—in Saigon and Paris—we must accelerate and solidify our contingency planning.

7. Continuing US troop redeployments are now an agreed assumption. The issues are those of force composition and timing. There are tough alternatives among which to choose and there are risks to be faced in the days ahead. Redeployment increment four may involve more problems than we have faced to date or will face in succeeding increments. General Wheeler and I shall address that situation and make appropriate recommendations to you as warranted.

**Melvin R. Laird**

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<sup>13</sup> Nixon underlined and highlighted this sentence and wrote in the margin: “K—we need a new Economic man *fast*—”

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## 188. Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, February 18, 1970.

### SUBJECT

Special National Intelligence Estimate on Factors Affecting North Vietnam’s Policy on the Vietnam War

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 144, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, March 1970. Secret. Sent for information. A note on the top of the memorandum reads: “ret’d, 2/20/70”



The attached Special National Intelligence Estimate on North Vietnam (Tab A)<sup>2</sup> concludes the following:

—The most likely course for Hanoi during 1970 is to pursue prolonged war tactics much along present lines. The North Vietnamese will continue to try to maintain sufficient military pressure to impose U.S. casualties, to inflict setbacks on Vietnamization and pacification and perhaps to engage in major tests of Vietnamization.

—The Communists will not be prepared to negotiate a general settlement in Vietnam, but they might see some utility in probing the possibility of arrangements which might hasten or fix a timetable for U.S. withdrawal. In this process, any concessions that Hanoi might make would be limited and not aimed at an overall settlement. Hanoi is counting on the odds swinging in its favor once the U.S. withdrawal has become militarily significant.

—Hanoi will not undertake an all-out military effort which would involve greater risks and heavier losses than it seems willing to contemplate at this time. Moreover, such action taken in the next six months would slow U.S. departure rather than hasten it.

—The Communists are in trouble in South Vietnam, and they recognize it themselves. They fear that they have overemphasized military action and neglected the political and subversive base. They are now making a great effort to restructure their apparatus in South Vietnam and enhance its staying power.

—While the Communists believe that they can prevail over the South Vietnamese Government structure over the long run, they cannot be certain of this so long as U.S. forces are in the South. They believe that Vietnamization presents the risk of an indefinite American presence, and they thus see themselves faced for the first time with an allied strategy designed to challenge their fundamental assumption. They see the Vietnamization program as essentially fragile but they recognize that it might work long enough and well enough to give the GVN a fair chance of holding its own. Hanoi particularly fears the pacification program.

—Ho Chi Minh's death<sup>3</sup> has complicated the task of achieving a united policy in Hanoi, though the leadership does not yet seem immobilized or in a state of disarray over policy differences or succession disputes.

—North Vietnam is suffering from economic problems, popular malaise and a degree of disaffection with the regime's goals, and from

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<sup>2</sup> Tab A is SNIE 14.3–70, "The Outlook From Hanoi: Factors Affecting North Vietnam's Policy on the War in Vietnam," February 5; attached but not printed.

<sup>3</sup> Ho Chi Minh died on September 3, 1969.

manpower problems which are perhaps more qualitative than quantitative. There has been a general domestic letdown within the North. This situation has probably compelled the leadership to give more of its attention to the North than it has had to do in earlier years.

—The Sino-Soviet conflict, if it remains at present levels, is a complicating but not determining factor in North Vietnamese policy calculations. Even if hostilities break out, the North Vietnamese leadership would be reasonably certain that it would still get the support it needs. However, if the hostilities spread and persist, Hanoi would deem it prudent to scale down its effort in the South and perhaps to move toward a cease-fire.

*Comment:* The judgments contained in the estimate impress us as being valid. We would add, though, that the estimate's analysis of Hanoi's policy glosses over somewhat the real dilemmas which Hanoi currently faces. To challenge the pacification program it must commit its main force units which it has been holding in the base areas along the Cambodian and Laotian borders; however, these units when committed run the risk of heavy losses and military defeat. On the other hand, if it holds back its main force units to avoid casualties and to keep its forces in being, its infrastructure in the countryside continues to suffer under the pacification program and its access to the people for food supply and combat support erodes further. The longer it delays, the worse off it finds itself militarily in the South—always the key element in Hanoi's calculations. Meanwhile, by stalling on the negotiations, Hanoi permits the U.S. to carry out Vietnamization at its own pace. The alternative is to offer concessions which the North Vietnamese are presently loathe to make. We believe we can see the pressures beginning to build up on Hanoi for some movement—the French Delegate General in Hanoi, for example, has reported that the North Vietnamese leaders seem depressed and aware that things have not gone as planned—although we doubt that any policy changes have yet been decided upon.

**189. Memorandum of Conversation<sup>1</sup>**

Paris, February 21, 1970, 9:40 a.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Le Duc Tho, Adviser to the North Vietnamese Delegation  
Xuan Thuy, Chief of Delegation  
Mai van Bo, North Vietnamese Delegate General in Paris  
North Vietnamese Interpreter  
Two Other North Vietnamese Officials  
Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Major General Vernon Walters, Defense Attaché, American Embassy, Paris  
W. Richard Smyser, NSC Staff  
W.A.K. Lake, NSC Staff

After introducing those accompanying him, particularly Mr. Smyser (so that they would know he was no longer with the Delegation), Mr. Kissinger said that it had been very complicated coming to Paris from Washington. He had told the French he was coming but not why. President Pompidou had invited him to lunch, and he had accepted as it provided a good pretext for being in Paris. Mr. Kissinger said that he would therefore have to leave around 12:15 p.m. In principle, he said, he could return later in the afternoon if it seemed necessary. They could decide whether another meeting would be desirable at the end of the current meeting.

At any rate, Mr. Kissinger said, they should know that the Pompidou lunch is a secret. No one in the United States Government knew he was in Paris except for the President and Mr. Kissinger's associates here at the meeting. We would like to keep this meeting a secret. The other side had been very reliable in this regard. (The North Vietnamese smiled.) Indeed, they had been more reliable than some of Mr. Kissinger's colleagues, he said. (More smiles.)

Xuan Thuy said that Mr. Kissinger had asked for this meeting through General Walters to tell them something further than what he had said previously. With regard to another meeting during the afternoon, Xuan Thuy said that could be decided later.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 852, For the President's File—Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. II. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. No drafting information appears on the source text. The meeting took place at 11 Rue Darthe, one of the residences of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in Paris. Kissinger sent Nixon this memorandum on February 25 and explained in an attached note that because the conversation was so lengthy, he had "indicated the most important remarks by a line in the margin." (Ibid.) During the meeting, Walters translated Kissinger's remarks into French and the North Vietnamese interpreter translated the French into Vietnamese. The process was reversed when Le Duc Tho or Xuan Thuy spoke. (Walters, *Silent Missions*, p. 515)

Mr. Kissinger said that it was always a pleasure to see them. He knew them better than he knew many other people, as he reads what they say with great care. In his communication to Xuan Thuy,<sup>2</sup> Mr. Kissinger said, he had indicated that there should be a meeting if both sides were ready to speak outside the normal framework—not just us.

Mr. Kissinger said he would like to begin with a few observations. He wanted first to discuss with them the general attitude of the President with regard to negotiations at Paris.

On January 14, 1969, Le Duc Tho had had a conversation with Governor Harriman and Mr. Vance.<sup>3</sup> He had said there were three ways to achieve a settlement. First, by good will; second, for us to try to negotiate from a firm position of strength—which would not work; and third, without negotiations, for us to try to gain military victory—which also would not work. Mr. Kissinger said that we are approaching the negotiations with good will and serious intent. The discussions he had with them should start from this assumption.

Of course, Mr. Kissinger continued, we all know that negotiations between our two sides are extremely difficult. It is difficult to decide what we are trying to achieve; and even agreeing on that, it is hard then to do it. Also, he said, the North Vietnamese have a long history of not being easy to negotiate with. (Mai van Bo and Xuan Thuy smiled; Tho did not.)

We recognize the negotiations are made harder by their distrust, Mr. Kissinger said, a distrust which is rooted in history. But he did not wish to discuss this history. If negotiations are to progress, we must surmount this mistrust. However difficult it will be to overcome this distrust now, it will be harder one or two years from now, or whenever we make peace. And sooner or later, we will have to make peace.

Mr. Kissinger asked if, as a professor on leave, he could next make a theoretical point. He had read that they believed they had been tricked in 1956 and that we were trying to trick them now. But we are not, he said, trying to do so—not because we are particularly benevolent, but because it would not be in our interest. We have learned that they fight when they believe they have been tricked. After a settlement, Mr. Kissinger said, they would be closer to South Vietnam than we. Therefore, we will want a settlement which is in their interest.

It was in this spirit, Mr. Kissinger continued, that he had come a long way to this meeting—in order to make one basic point. We all

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<sup>2</sup> See Document 166.

<sup>3</sup> As reported in telegram 734/Delto 1173 from Paris, January 16. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 172, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, Vol. I, Nodis/Paris Meeting Plus)

could sit here and use phrases like good will, or endlessly discuss issues along the lines of speeches we know by heart from the Majestic meetings. But the problem is how to bring the negotiations to a conclusion. For this, we need agreement on the objectives of the negotiations and a program of work.

Last August, Mr. Kissinger went on, when he had had a private meeting with Messrs. Xuan Thuy and his old acquaintance Mai van Bo, he had suggested a settlement in a specific period of time.<sup>4</sup> For some reasons, the other side did not agree. Mr. Kissinger said that he believed we had all missed an opportunity. Now, we believe that the other side's situation is not better. Nor will it get better. We should now see if we can accomplish something.<sup>5</sup>

Mr. Kissinger said that when they had met in August, he had indicated he did not believe it was in their interest to make this Mr. Nixon's war, as once they had done so, it would be difficult for him not to try to win it. He had said that they were an heroic people, and no one knew the result of such a sequence of events. We would prefer not to test it.

When they had met in August, Mr. Kissinger said, it was reasonable for the other side to believe that our domestic situation would become more and more complicated. In the interval, our domestic situation had become stronger. Mr. Kissinger said he would explain why. The North Vietnamese in Paris see many Americans who are extremely sympathetic with their position. But in the last election, the big bloc of votes which could make a difference was not on the left, but on the right. Last October, when there had been a public opinion problem, the President moved toward these votes. Mr. Kissinger said that he was speaking in a good spirit, but it was important that the other side understand that the normal support of a Republican administration is on the right; the President can appeal to people whom President Johnson could not reach. Mr. Kissinger said that the Administration does not want to move this way, but the President may have to.

Mr. Kissinger stated we also believe that since August 1969 the situation in South Vietnam has become more problematical for the other side. We know that they may not agree with this assessment, but don't wish to argue it. We would simply say that nothing is to be gained by waiting.

Finally, Mr. Kissinger said, it is our judgment that the international situation has complications which may make Vietnam no longer the undivided concern of other countries and may mean that Vietnam will

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<sup>4</sup> See the attachment to Document 106.

<sup>5</sup> Kissinger highlighted this and the following paragraph for the President.

not enjoy the undivided support of countries which now support it. He would simply say that this was another reason why we believe there is nothing to be gained by waiting.

Mr. Kissinger said that he was saying this in a good spirit and with an attitude of trying to resolve the conflict—not from any attitude of hostility or intransigence. He was at the meeting to discuss whether they could agree on the objectives of the negotiations and a work program.

Many people, Mr. Kissinger continued, seem to believe that the negotiations are like a long, drawn-out mystery in which their side throws out faint clues and we guess at the solution which has eluded us so long. Minister Xuan Thuy, he said, is expert at making enigmatic declarations to visiting Americans, to make them believe that they are at the edge of something. Having read everything that the other side had said over the years, Mr. Kissinger held the opposite view. When they had something new to say, they made it clear. Therefore, Mr. Kissinger said, we believe we should speak frankly from a clear position. He hoped they could be clear in this channel.

Mr. Kissinger therefore wished to state two propositions: First, it seems to us that the other side wants as a condition of negotiations to be guaranteed political predominance, with us to rely on their good faith and self-restraint. On the other hand, to them, it may seem that we seek military predominance and would have them rely on our good faith and self-restraint. We believe, Mr. Kissinger said, that the task we have here is to see if we can resolve this difference.<sup>6</sup>

In order to make clear our position, Mr. Kissinger said, he would like to put forward some views of the President. Mr. Le Duc Tho once said that he thought the U.S. wants to drag out the war in order to strengthen the government in Saigon, and so we did not want to withdraw our troops. Mr. Kissinger said he was at the meeting to tell them that we agree to the principle of total withdrawal of American forces and there would be no American bases in Vietnam after the conclusion of negotiations. We prefer negotiations to Vietnamization and would choose the latter only if it were obvious that negotiations would not succeed.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, he continued, we recognize that Hanoi has a special problem in placing their troops on the same legal basis as ours, since they do not consider them foreign troops and indeed have never

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<sup>6</sup> The North Vietnamese did not understand the translation of this. Mr. Kissinger said that at Harvard, “heavy words” are often confused with profundity. Everyone laughed, and Mai Van Bo said that Xuan Thuy is not the only one to make enigmatic statements. [Footnote in the source text.]

<sup>7</sup> Kissinger highlighted this and the next two paragraphs for the President.

admitted their presence in the South. Mr. Kissinger said that we respect their attitude, and are interested in practical, not theoretical, solutions.

With respect to a political solution, Mr. Kissinger said, there are two ways of dealing with it. First, after withdrawal of external military forces, the South Vietnamese could settle it among themselves. Secondly, if it is to be part of our negotiations, we would follow the following principles:

—The political solution must reflect the existing political realities in South Vietnam and we realize that neither side can be expected to give up in negotiations what had not been conceded on the battlefield.

—We believe that a fair political process must register the existing relationship of political forces.

The question then, Mr. Kissinger said, is how to proceed. We could proceed in this channel to discuss their ten points and our eight points.<sup>8</sup> This was attempted at some private meetings.<sup>9</sup> While we are ready to proceed this way, it was Mr. Kissinger's personal opinion that we would quickly arrive at serious disagreements. Therefore, he said, another way of proceeding might be to put aside their ten points and our eight points, and define some general principles—objectives—of what we might achieve. The details could be negotiated in the meetings between our delegations at the Majestic Hotel. If this procedure is adopted, we would be ready to send a new negotiating team which is not married to the old form of the negotiations.

We would approach such a procedure with a constructive attitude, Mr. Kissinger continued, attempting to take into account their concerns, and in the hope that this would be their attitude as well. We would also suggest setting a deadline of June 1 or July 1—we are flexible about the exact date—to let us know what we are working towards. The President had also authorized Mr. Kissinger to say that he would let Mr. Kissinger go on participating in these discussions.

Once we establish such a timetable, he said, we will do our best to maintain it, but progress depends on maintaining what we have done to date. Mr. Kissinger said that he would tell them in all frank-

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<sup>8</sup> The 10-point peace program was put forward by the National Liberation Front at the 16th plenary session of the Paris negotiations on May 8, 1969. The text of the NLF's 10-point program is in Stebbins and Adam, *Documents on American Foreign Policy, 1968–1969*, pp. 249–252. Nixon responded with an eight-point program which he enumerated in a May 14 televised address to the nation. The text of Nixon's eight-point program is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1969*, p. 373.

<sup>9</sup> Kissinger highlighted the rest of this paragraph beginning at this point and the next two paragraphs for the President.

ness that an increase in violence would be inconsistent with this, would be to no one's advantage, and could have serious consequences.

At our last meeting, Mr. Kissinger said, Minister Xuan Thuy said that their side wants peace, not war. We feel the same way. The President will be in office another seven years. It is not necessary or desirable for either side to prove its courage any further. They have proved the great skill, tenacity, and heroism with which they could make war. Mr. Kissinger said he was at the meeting to see if we could make peace. We want a peace which both sides will wish to maintain; any other peace will not last. Strange as this may seem after all we have been through together, an independent, prosperous, and self-reliant Vietnam is in our national interest as we see it. In any historic period, we are not a threat to Vietnamese independence.

Mr. Kissinger said he would like to conclude by repeating something President Nixon had said in his speech to the UN: "The people of Vietnam, North and South alike, have demonstrated heroism enough to last a century. When the war ends, the United States will stand ready to help the people of Vietnam—all of them—in their tasks of renewal and reconstruction."<sup>10</sup>

Mr. Kissinger said that he was at the meeting in that spirit, and expected it to carry over into our future relationship.

He then apologized for speaking so long, explaining that Harvard professors always speak for 55 minutes. (North Vietnamese smiles.)

(There was then a 10-minute break. Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy went off to consult.)

After the break, Mr. Kissinger noted that Joe Kraft had urged him to see Le Duc Tho, whom Kraft greatly admired. Kraft would probably soon write articles accusing Mr. Kissinger of being war-like. (North Vietnamese smiles.)

Xuan Thuy then said that since he had last met Mr. Kissinger on August 4, the negotiations between the U.S., DRV, PRG, and Saigon administration, at the Avenue Kleber, as well as the private meetings, had obviously deteriorated.

Mr. Kissinger had suggested at that time that we should reach a settlement by November 1st. But Xuan Thuy remembered that on August 4 Mr. Kissinger did not raise any concrete contents in his remarks. Mr. Kissinger had suggested that they open another forum between Xuan Thuy and the U.S. As for the North Vietnamese, they had put forward two concrete points for August 4. Xuan Thuy had said on that

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<sup>10</sup> Kissinger is quoting two extracts from the Vietnam portion of the President's address to the 24th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, September 18, 1969. (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1969*, pp. 725–727)



day that the U.S. should withdraw its troops rapidly within five or six months. Secondly, the formation of a provisional coalition government including three components had been raised. Since that meeting was concluded, the North Vietnamese did not see any response from the U.S. side. Therefore, between the two dates of August 4 and the end of October, if we had not settled any questions, it was not on account of the North Vietnamese side but because the U.S. did not give any answer to their proposals.

Then in November, Xuan Thuy continued, President Nixon gave a speech<sup>11</sup> that the North Vietnamese have publicly qualified as a war speech. Public opinion has also considered it a war speech.

Mr. Kissinger asked: Whose public opinion? Xuan Thuy replied, "The U.S. and elsewhere."

Mr. Kissinger said, "not in the U.S." President Nixon's popularity has increased 20%, he noted. Xuan Thuy said that this was Mr. Kissinger's assessment. He was speaking of his own. Mr. Kissinger had a theory from Harvard, he said smiling, and he had one from Hanoi. Mr. Kissinger said that they should wait until he lectured at Harvard on public opinion in North Vietnam.

Xuan Thuy said that Mr. Nixon's November speech had put emphasis on Vietnamization, and belittled the Paris negotiations. Actually, he said, the policy of Vietnamization was applied before President Nixon made his speech. But in his November speech, he publicly announced emphasis on Vietnamization. Since then, the U.S. Government side made great publicity about the success of Vietnamization. This is its right—Xuan Thuy would not argue about that. But from their point of view, they could see that if Vietnamization does not bring any success, but the U.S. believes it does, this would be subjective thinking. If it is really not a success, and the U.S. says it is, that would be deceiving U.S. public opinion.

With regard to the Paris conference, Xuan Thuy said that since the August meeting, the U.S. Government had agreed to the retirement of Ambassador Lodge without naming a successor.

Now, he continued, Mr. Kissinger says that the U.S. really wants peace. He says that it is the real intention of the U.S. to withdraw all U.S. forces and military bases. But in reality, in practice, one doesn't see any evidence of this desire. With regard to troop withdrawal, the U.S. does withdraw troops, but this the North Vietnamese have characterized as withdrawal by dribblets. It has no significance at all in comparison to the total of more than 500,000 men. Besides, many person-

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<sup>11</sup> Reference is to Nixon's Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam, November 3, 1969. (Ibid., pp. 901–909)

alities in U.S. political circles have publicly made known the U.S. intention to leave behind 200,000 to 300,000 troops. If the U.S. announced it will totally withdraw its troops without any reservation, but with the withdrawals going on for years and years, this too will have no practical significance at all.

What they would like to know, Xuan Thuy said, is when total withdrawal of U.S. troops—without leaving behind any troops or bases—will be completed.<sup>12</sup>

In the meantime, he continued, U.S. air activity has greatly intensified, as well as the spreading of toxic chemicals. Pacification operations and massacres of the civilian population have also been stepped up.

So they wonder, Xuan Thuy said, how we can say that we have been reducing our activities in South Vietnam. Moreover, reduction is not the act they are demanding. They are demanding the withdrawal of all troops, to put an end to the war.

Xuan Thuy said that in Laos, it is the same thing—the U.S. Air Force carries out activities throughout Laos with increased intensity. All this makes them put an interrogation point on the good faith of the U.S.

Moreover, Xuan Thuy continued, in his November speech President Nixon seemed to make a threat against them. Xuan Thuy had often stated, and even in the meeting on August 4, that threats have no effect at all on the Vietnamese people. It is not their intention to have a test of force with the U.S., because it is known to the whole world that the U.S. has more people and resources than Vietnam, and is technically and scientifically stronger. But the question is that they have to defend their independence, to defend their real freedom and the peace of their people.<sup>13</sup>

Xuan Thuy then recalled that Mr. Kissinger had said that public opinion in the U.S. and the world is now different from what it was in August, and Hanoi could not wait for it. This idea was expressed many times, Xuan Thuy said, by Mr. Cabot Lodge, and now Mr. Kissinger repeated it. Xuan Thuy had been answering that the Vietnamese people are fighting for genuine independence, freedom and peace. In fighting, they rely mainly on their own force, on their own line and policy, on their own spirit, on the cohesion and unity of the Vietnamese people. In the past, when fighting against other imperialist powers, it had been the same thing. They have been fighting U.S. aggression for tens of years. This is not a new fact. But the anti-war movement in the U.S. and the world began only a few years ago. Before the movements

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<sup>12</sup> Kissinger highlighted this paragraph for the President.

<sup>13</sup> Kissinger highlighted this paragraph for the President.

began, on what did they rely to fight aggression? Therefore, they don't wait for the peace movement in the U.S. But naturally, Xuan Thuy said, if the anti-war movements in the U.S. and the world support their struggle, they must be grateful to them.

Xuan Thuy said that what they are waiting for is when Vietnam will be really free, independent, and peaceful. As long as Vietnam is not free, independent and peaceful, the Vietnamese people have no other way but to fight for these objectives.

Xuan Thuy said that Mr. Kissinger had asked what could be our objectives. Xuan Thuy said he did not know about American objectives. For them, it is to carry on negotiations and come to real freedom, independence, and peace for Vietnam. To do so, the U.S. must stop reconnaissance flights over the DRV and stop bombing raids between the 19th and 17th parallels. As for South Vietnam, the U.S. should totally withdraw its troops and those of other countries in the U.S. camp, and put an end to all acts—chemical warfare, bombing raids, and massacres of the civilian population.

Xuan Thuy said that they have spoken about rapid withdrawal. Mrs. Binh had put it more concretely. If the U.S. agrees to withdraw in six months, concrete discussions could be held about the security of the troops as they left.<sup>14</sup> As for the political program, Xuan Thuy said, they have proposed a coalition government including the three components. This would not be a monopoly of anyone—of the NLF, the PRG, or of the Saigon administration. It would belong to the people of South Vietnam.

Moreover, Xuan Thuy continued, in August Mr. Kissinger had raised the question of keeping the existing format at Kleber and establishing a new format as well. If so, the U.S. should have appointed a new head to the delegation, because Xuan Thuy had agreed to those procedures.

Xuan Thuy then asked if he could remark that Mr. Kissinger had had to make arrangements at home in order to come to Paris, which had involved him in complexities. He too had work at home, in Hanoi. He had been in Paris for two years, which shows that the North Vietnamese want peace too.

Now, Xuan Thuy said, with regard to a peaceful settlement of the Vietnamese war, if we thought the situation had deteriorated for their side and they thought it had deteriorated for our side, it would take much time to speak of this.

So, Xuan Thuy said, that is the fact of the matter. Mr. Kissinger had come a long way. They were prepared to settle the matter, Xuan

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<sup>14</sup> The second of the NLF's 10 points of May 8, 1969.

Thuy said. If we wanted to talk, we should go straight into the heart of the matter, and find a solution.

Xuan Thuy said that he had listened to Mr. Kissinger's explanation, and found no great differences from last time. There are two main questions:

—The first is troop withdrawals, and Mr. Kissinger had not said when they would be completed.

—The second concerns the government. Mr. Kissinger still was saying that neither side could give up at the negotiation table what had not been conceded on the battlefield. The U.S. still placed emphasis not on troop withdrawals, but on settlement among the Vietnamese. This is the main thing.

For them, Xuan Thuy said, they think that if there is a settlement it should be a "package settlement." It could cover how really to respect the right of the South Vietnamese people to self-determination and how to really end the war.<sup>15</sup>

And so, Xuan Thuy said, he thought that with regard to how to proceed in the negotiations, that is one question. We should go straight into the problem. Then the question of how to proceed can be easily solved. This is what he had to say about Mr. Kissinger's explanations. They would agree to meet again at 4:00 p.m. or 4:30 p.m.

Mr. Kissinger asked if he could make two or three points about what Minister Xuan Thuy had said, so that they could begin on a positive note in the afternoon. He said that he would speak with the frankness which is the only point of a meeting where he met with people of their level.

Mr. Kissinger said that Minister Xuan Thuy had stated that they made two specific proposals at the last meeting, to which we didn't respond. He would like to point out two things:

—Both had been made before, and did not require his presence in Paris.

—It is easy to make proposals demanding that the other side do something. This is not a negotiation. This, he believed, is the difficulty of our negotiations. Minister Xuan Thuy and others have said repeatedly that if we withdraw in six months, they will discuss the modalities. But we don't have to discuss this with them—we could do it on our own—and would not expect them to do anything about it. They would not—and could not—oppose our withdrawal.

Mr. Kissinger said that he was at the meeting to tell them on behalf of the President that we are willing in negotiations to fix a

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<sup>15</sup> Kissinger highlighted this paragraph and the first three sentences of the next paragraph for the President.

deadline for U.S. withdrawal, so that the other side can see whether all Americans have really withdrawn. All the discussions of how many troops will remain under Vietnamization are theoretical. If Vietnamization succeeds, we will withdraw the most. If it does not, we will be in an uncertain area.<sup>16</sup>

Mr. Kissinger said that we face an area of conflicting judgments. They believe our judgments are subjective. We believe theirs are subjective. The only way we can find out who is right is to continue the war. They have told us that they prefer not to do that. We feel the same way.

We read every word that Minister Xuan Thuy, Le Duc Tho and other North Vietnamese said with the greatest care. In reading the records of the negotiations in August, September and October, we came to the conclusion that nothing was happening. Certainly they made no effort to activate this channel after we had opened it in August, and this meeting was being held at Mr. Kissinger's initiative. Mr. Kissinger said we believe that the level of delegation we now have is adequate for the level of discussions now going on. As he had pointed out in his statement, when it appears that negotiations are on a new basis, we will put in new individuals who are not so committed by the patterns of the past.<sup>17</sup>

Mr. Kissinger then said that he would like to make one statement of fact. Minister Xuan Thuy had said that we have intensified our air activity. We don't care what they say publicly, but they should know in Hanoi that we have in fact made a reduction of 25% of the activities both of B-52's and of other aircraft. Their propaganda was up to them, but this is a fact their leaders should know. Mr. Kissinger then noted that he agreed with Minister Xuan Thuy—we are not talking about how to reduce the war, but about how to end it.

Mr. Kissinger said that he accepted with pleasure the proposal of Minister Xuan Thuy to meet at 4:00 p.m. We could then go to the heart of the matter, in a spirit of reciprocity, and not repeat what we already know and have said.

Xuan Thuy said he would like to add one word. With regard to what he had been saying, he had documents, records and proof. The U.S. had often said that the North Vietnamese were here for propaganda. If this were the case, Xuan Thuy said, they would have sent cadres who are expert at propaganda and would have had no need to send him and Le Duc Tho. Also, the U.S. had much stronger means for propaganda than the North Vietnamese.

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<sup>16</sup> Kissinger highlighted this and the next paragraph for the President.

<sup>17</sup> Kissinger highlighted the last two sentences of this paragraph for the President.

As a final word, Xuan Thuy said that he would like to speak about keeping secrets. Mr. Kissinger had spoken of this. So had President Nixon's letter to President Ho Chi Minh,<sup>18</sup> and Ambassador Lodge had also recommended secrecy. Then President Nixon spoke of everything on November 3. Was this for propaganda? They, Xuan Thuy said, keep their word; they match their words to their deeds. The leakage was on the U.S. side.

Le Duc Tho said that Mr. Kissinger had spoken also of how to overcome mistrust. When our side did not keep so minor a promise, how could we speak of mistrust?

Mr. Kissinger said that if we made a catalog of grievances, he would not get back to Washington for a long time. He recalled that the North Vietnamese had published an exchange of letters between President Johnson and President Ho Chi Minh.<sup>19</sup>

As for the private meetings, a number of U.S. journalists were told by people on their delegation that we were not ready for private talks. This question therefore became part of the public debate.

In any event, Mr. Kissinger continued, they could be certain that any undertakings in this channel would be strictly protected. No one can fool Mr. Le Duc Tho and Minister Xuan Thuy twice. (Smiles all around.)

Le Duc Tho said that they have been fooled many times. Mr. Kissinger said, "Not by me."

Mr. Kissinger said he recognized that anything Minister Xuan Thuy said was based on documents. Minister Xuan Thuy is a serious man. We have great respect for him. The difficult problems are not when falsehood confronts truth, but when two truths confront each other.

The North Vietnamese all smiled and Le Duc Tho exclaimed—"Philosophy!" Mr. Kissinger said that he understands Le Duc Tho is an expert in theory. Xuan Thuy said that actually Mr. Kissinger was a professor of philosophy at an American university, so his speeches always contained philosophy. Mr. Kissinger said that he does believe philosophy must precede practice, so he finds Marxism interesting. (More North Vietnamese smiles.)

Mr. Kissinger said that he would see them at 4:00 o'clock and regretted any inconvenience his having to go to lunch may have caused them. The North Vietnamese said that there was none.

(The meeting ended at 12:20 p.m.)

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<sup>18</sup> Dated July 15, 1969; see footnotes 3 and 4, Document 97.

<sup>19</sup> On March 21 the DRV broadcast on Radio Hanoi the text of President Johnson's letter to Ho Chi Minh, February 8, 1967, as well as the text of Ho Chi Minh's response, February 15. Both are printed in Department of State *Bulletin*, April 10, 1967, pp. 595–597.

**190. Memorandum of Conversation<sup>1</sup>**

Paris, February 21, 1970, 4:10 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Le Duc Tho, Adviser to the North Vietnamese Delegation  
Xuan Thuy, Chief of Delegation  
Mai van Bo, North Vietnamese Delegate General in Paris  
North Vietnamese Interpreter  
Two Other North Vietnamese Officials  
Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Major General Vernon Walters, Defense Attaché, American Embassy, Paris  
W. Richard Smyser, NSC Staff  
W.A.K. Lake, NSC Staff

Xuan Thuy: I spoke at this morning's meeting. I would now like to hear what you have come to say.

Mr. Kissinger: I spoke last this morning. Minister Xuan Thuy said it was essential that we arrive at the heart of the problem. I believe that you, Minister Xuan Thuy or Mr. Le Duc Tho, should say what this means.

Xuan Thuy: I said this morning that you had said nothing new in comparison with the last time. You had said in asking for this meeting that you had something further to say. Please tell us what you mean by that.

Mr. Kissinger: I said this morning, as in the communication through General Walters, that we are willing to talk outside the existing framework. I said this morning that two things are needed: instead of arguing about the 8 and 10 points, we should establish a list of agreed objectives, and a work program. We are prepared to negotiate as part of this program the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops after a settlement is reached.<sup>2</sup>

Xuan Thuy: I would like to ask a few questions. What did you mean by the phrase "logical political process" in South Vietnam in your statement last August? This morning there was another point not clear to me. What did you mean by your statement that we want political superiority and you military superiority?

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 852, For the President's File—Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. II. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. No drafting information appears on the memorandum. The meeting took place at 11 Rue Darthe. Kissinger "indicated the most important remarks by a line in the margin" for Nixon.

<sup>2</sup> Kissinger highlighted this paragraph for the President.

Mr. Kissinger: As the Delegate General has pointed out, I may have read so many of your words that I am beginning to speak in paradoxical terms myself, but the question the Minister has put is an important one. I want to talk to you seriously about it.

I know it is part of the Vietnamese mentality—easily explained by history and recent events—to believe that all foreigners, especially those at war, have a desire to be treacherous to the Vietnamese people. I will not therefore try to impress you with what I say, because as Vietnamese and as Marxists you are not too impressed by anything but objective factors.

But I try to understand why it is that the two sides have reached a complete impasse in the negotiations. For selfish reasons, I try to understand your position as well as I can.

What I tried to say this morning was that from *our* point of view the objective consequence of your proposals is to give political dominance to the NLF, after which we must rely on your good faith and self-restraint. You do not say this is your intention, but it is the practical consequence of your position. At the same time, I can understand from your point of view, it may seem that what we are trying to do is get military predominance, and put you at our mercy.

Xuan Thuy: That is now clear.

Mr. Kissinger: Since neither side wants to put itself at the mercy of the other, we have a problem. This is the problem I have come here to help start solving. Please excuse the long answer.

Le Duc Tho: You said that we should list the objectives we want to reach. What are your objectives? What is your work program?

Mr. Kissinger: We have two problems:

The first is to agree that this is a good approach.

The second is to give content to this approach.

Let me answer your second question first.

With respect to a work program—and we of course are willing to listen to your counterproposals because this is a delicate problem—as I told Minister Xuan Thuy when we met in August and can repeat more specifically now, the President has said that to show his interest he is prepared to let me act in a principal, if informal, capacity, on matters of fundamental importance and to meet with someone from your side at regular intervals to resolve these questions.

It may be necessary from time to time to substitute someone for me who has our confidence, when my visibility does not allow me to come.

If we agree on what it is we want to accomplish and how, we could agree also on what tasks to give to the delegations at Avenue Kleber.



In other words, the delegations would handle the details of what we agree on in principle. And, as I pointed out this morning, we would see to it that our representation would be of a background to handle this new approach.

As for the first question, I think we should take the two problems which Minister Xuan Thuy and I mentioned, and liberate them from the liturgical quality which they have had at Avenue Kleber.

We should agree on an approximate timetable on which to accomplish our work.

Le Duc Tho: You mean two problems, military and political?

Mr. Kissinger: Yes.

Le Duc Tho: You said you are willing to listen to our counter-proposal. But we cannot give one since your proposal is not yet concrete.

Mr. Kissinger: What would Mr. Le Duc Tho consider a concrete proposal?

Le Duc Tho: If a discussion is to be held, there should be a program. What program do you have in mind? The definition of your program is not clear yet.

Mr. Kissinger: I shall speak with the frankness I hope I have shown before. I do so with some somberness because this is an important meeting. If it fails completely, we will be in an impasse and it would be difficult to see how to get out of it except by a continued testing of each other. As you know, I belong to those who since 1965 have tried to find a negotiated end to that war in Vietnam. I belong to those who believed that an end of the bombing would lead to productive negotiations. I have attempted to understand and study you very carefully.

It seems to us that there is a certain pattern in your method of negotiation. This method is that you are attempting to make us pay again and again for the beginning of negotiations. You bank every proposal we make, and in return you offer only your presence at negotiations. We believe that the biggest problem we face now is whether you are in fact willing to negotiate as we understand negotiation.

It is, of course, difficult for men who have shown your heroism and dedication to envisage an end to the war which doesn't guarantee all of your immediate objectives. It is not easy for us either, because we too have had over a period of time to adjust some of our thinking.

Therefore I do not think I should put before you a very concrete list of proposals—except to say that in a real negotiation, the President has said many times you will find our side flexible and generous. If we tried to fool you, you would discover it very quickly.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Kissinger highlighted this and the next two paragraphs for the President.

The President has charged me with this responsibility of talking to you gentlemen because we thought this private vehicle would allow both sides to speak more frankly, and would make it easier to change positions already taken in the established framework.

Our basic approach is to deal with you on a basis of reciprocity and respect. On this basis, we believe we both might try to move the negotiations forward.

We could, for example, agree today on a time to meet again, and put as the first item on the agenda the withdrawal of forces, as I stated in my statement—not just of our forces, but of all non-South Vietnamese forces.

We understand that the arrangements for the withdrawal of your forces could be put in a special category. We would not insist that they be placed on the same legal basis as ours.<sup>4</sup>

Le Duc Tho: I have met you for the first time today. I have read the minutes of your previous meeting in August. I have attentively listened to your statement this morning. Minister Xuan Thuy has answered you on all the points you have raised. Now I would like to add some views of mine.

I would like to speak about your views of a settlement of the Vietnam problem, and about our views on a settlement, and about the issues. But I would like to speak first about your assessment of the situation on the battlefield in South Vietnam, of which you spoke this morning. Only when we have a correct assessment of the balance of forces, can we have a correct solution.

Mr. Kissinger: I agree.

Le Duc Tho: I believe that your assessment is not correct and not in conformity with reality. But it is your right to assess in accordance with your subjective assessment.

I believe that over the past 15 years your assessment of the balance of forces was incorrect. I would like to recall the facts. From that, I think you can have a more correct assessment, and we may have a correct solution.<sup>5</sup>

After the restoration of peace in 1954, our cadres and troops were regrouped to the North. The French left Indochina. You built a puppet administration in South Vietnam, and equipped it.

There were a number of massacres against the people, of even greater barbarity than under the French.

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<sup>4</sup> Kissinger highlighted this paragraph for the President.

<sup>5</sup> Kissinger highlighted this paragraph for the President.

You thought that with such repressive measures the people of South Vietnam would not stand up against these forces, but they did. They staged simultaneous uprisings and seized power in many localities. That was the first time you were mistaken in your assessment.

Afterward, you further strengthened the administration of South Vietnam and then came the strategic hamlets. But the people in South Vietnam destroyed the strategic hamlets and defeated the special war. That is the second time you made a mistaken assessment.

Then you massively sent troops to South Vietnam, to a total of nearly 600,000 if you count your allies. You used a quantity of shells and bombs greater than in any war, including toxic chemicals. It was thought that no life was possible in such shelling and chemical sprays. But the people, the compatriots in South Vietnam, not only stood up, they also defeated these attacks. That was the situation when General Westmoreland and Ambassador Lodge reported back to the U.S. Government that the situation was very good.

Then came Tet Mau Tanh (1968). It was a big failure for you. It was the third time you were mistaken in your assessment.

Now, Dr. Kissinger once again is mistaken in his assessment. If you continue to make your assessment in such a way, I am convinced you will again meet with failure. Yesterday I read President Nixon's message on the world situation<sup>6</sup> and today I have listened to your speech.<sup>7</sup> You said again that since August 1969 the situation has deteriorated for our side. This is your assessment in South Vietnam. In North Vietnam, you think we have great difficulties. You think the situation in the U.S. is better and better, and that in the international situation, the support we get will be less certain.

My subjective assessment is that it is not as you say.

You are applying Vietnamization, which you think is bringing success. But actually in South Vietnam, Vietnamization is beginning to suffer initial defeats. Even Secretary Laird visited South Vietnam and has said that it is having success but may have setbacks. As for South Vietnam, many U.S. journalists have come. Recently Cyrus Eaton visited North Vietnam. As for the situation in North Vietnam, we must say that the air war did create destruction in North Vietnam. But even under such fierce conditions of war, we succeeded in keeping the people's life normal. The journalists' assessment of the recent Tet will show

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<sup>6</sup> Reference is to Nixon's First Annual Report on United States Foreign Policy, transmitted to Congress on February 18. For text, see *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pp. 115–190.

<sup>7</sup> At this point, Mr. Kissinger interjected: You should be careful; some of the report's authors are here. They don't mind what you say about me, but they do care what you say about the report. (North Vietnamese smiles.) [Footnote in the source text.]

that life was normal. Living conditions in North Vietnam are lower than in the United States. But the war has not quenched the spirit of our people. We live in a normal way.

You opened a new battlefield in Laos, and tried to crush the Pathet Lao forces, and coordinated military pressures in Laos and Vietnam. But recently, the Pathet Lao have reoccupied the Plain of Jars.

As for the situation in the United States, you understand it better than I. Yesterday I read a statement by Humphrey. He said the U.S. is faced by two problems, Vietnam and the economy. I think they are linked. You said that since August 1969 the situation in the U.S. has changed for the better, but actually since then the anti-war movement has surged higher than ever. I also want to cite the recent Gallup poll, which showed that some months ago 21 per cent of the people in the U.S. wanted immediate withdrawal, but now 35 per cent.

But a sounding of public opinion is only public opinion. In addition, I have seen many statements by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, by the Democratic Party, by Mr. Clifford, which have demanded the total withdrawal of American forces, the change of Thieu–Ky–Khiem, and the appointment of a successor to Ambassador Lodge.

As for the world supporting us, we think we understand that better than you. Within one month of its founding, over 30 countries have recognized the PRG. That is support.

With the death of President Ho Chi Minh—he was our leader—but due to the resistance struggle of our people, his death became a source of inspiration to us.

You are still following the situation in North Vietnam to see if it will create problems for the people. This is an illusion.

Thus I must tell you that your assessment is not correct, according to my subjective assessment.

Naturally, in this war we have had many hardships to go through. But we have won the war. You have failed.

Mr. Kissinger: What?

Le Duc Tho: We have won the war. Due to your wrong assessment, you have lost the war, the longest and most costly in your history. This is not just our own view. Americans also think that.<sup>8</sup>

Now you think that since August the situation has deteriorated for our side. This wrong assessment will lead you to the wrong policies also. So I feel you have not realized this objective reality. You still believe in making maximum military pressure on the battlefield.

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<sup>8</sup> Kissinger highlighted this paragraph for the President.

We believe that up to now you are not yet willing to have serious negotiations to settle the problem. In his November 3 speech, President Nixon said that no matter what may happen in Paris, he will carry out his private plan—his Vietnamization plan. In the annual message about the world, he said Vietnamization would push forward negotiations. Does that mean that he wants through military pressure to have a strong position at the negotiating table?

We think that you have two methods to try to end the war: (1) Vietnamization; and (2) negotiations from a position of strength. How do you want to apply Vietnamization? You proceed with a gradual withdrawal of U.S. forces down to a level bearable to the American people in human lives and cost. You will leave behind enough support forces to help the puppet forces to prolong the war. You try to strengthen the puppet troops, so they can assume responsibility for the war, and leave behind a large number of advisers. This is what people, including Secretary Laird, have said.

But we wonder whether and when the puppet troops can do that. It will take an unlimited time. We don't know when, or whether, it will be done. If it does not work, you will have the choice to remain in Vietnam or leave. We are convinced the puppet troops cannot assume this responsibility. So you will stay, and the war will drag on, and you will remain in our country.<sup>9</sup>

We are not alone in saying that Vietnamization will prolong the war. Many Americans also say this and are protesting. Therefore many are asking themselves whether Vietnamization can achieve success. You still believe that it can, according to your assessment. But we are firmly convinced it will meet with failure.

Because you were mistaken in your assessment, you met with failure in the special war; because you were again mistaken you met with greater failure in the local war; now again, because you are mistaken, you will meet with greater failure. Because the policy of Vietnamization contains many contradictions in itself.

In the beginning, you applied de-Americanization in the special war. Then, failing, you Americanized the war and met with failure. So you again de-Americanize. Before, there were over a million U.S. and puppet troops, and you failed. How can you succeed when you let the puppet troops do the fighting? Now, with only U.S. support, how can you win?

The trend of the war is heading for failure for you. So how can Vietnamization be a success, when you are already heading for failure?

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<sup>9</sup> Kissinger highlighted this paragraph for the President.

Public opinion in the U.S., the press, and many U.S. political figures, doubt the success of Vietnamization. In his annual message, President Nixon said that he is still testing this policy. Let him test it.

How can you force us to accept your conditions in negotiations if Vietnamization is failing? If you continue to persist in the wrong assessment, to Vietnamize the war, and to exert maximum military pressure, that is your right. But in our view you have been mistaken, and you will commit a greater mistake. Our people will not step back before military pressure. We have been fighting for tens of years with weapons in our hands.

If you prolong the war, we have to continue to fight. If you intensify the war in South Vietnam, if you even resume bombing North Vietnam, we are prepared. We are determined to continue the fight until we win victory.

If our generation cannot win, then our sons and nephews will continue. We will sacrifice everything, but we will not again have slavery. This is our iron will. We have been fighting for 25 years, the French and you. You wanted to quench our spirit with bombs and shells. But they cannot force us to submit.

You have threatened us many times. The last time when you spoke to Minister Xuan Thuy, you threatened us. President Nixon also threatens us. But you have read our history. We fought against the French for nine years. We were empty-handed. Myself, I participated in this resistance war against the French, without knowing military things. Yet we won victory.<sup>10</sup>

You have been fighting us for many years and you see how we have been fighting back for our independence and freedom.

Even though you continue, you cannot change the trend of the war.

This is not a challenge. I am frank. We are a small people. We cannot challenge anybody. We have been under domination for many years.

Therefore, if you continue with Vietnamization, with the search for a position of strength, maximum military pressure, we will continue to fight, and I am convinced we will win victory.

But on the contrary, if you really want to have serious negotiations to settle the war, if you really want to follow up what I said to Harri-man, we are prepared to join you.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Kissinger highlighted this paragraph for the President.

<sup>11</sup> Kissinger highlighted this and the next three paragraphs for the President.

We have negotiated many times; in 1946, with the French; in 1954, with the French, and the participation of the Americans too. In 1962, again with Americans. We settled matters in a logical and reasonable way.

In fact, if one side wants peace and the other war, no settlement can be reached. If you want war and we peace, we cannot settle. If we want war and you peace, we cannot settle. When both want peace, we can settle.

I think it is time for you and for us to reach a peaceful settlement. But I wonder whether really you want peace. You talk a great deal about peace. President Nixon talks about peace. You did so this morning. But, as you said, we have distrust.

You talk peace, but you make war. The problem is how to get around this. Your words are sometimes not matched by peace. We are an oppressed people, who have often been fooled by other people. We signed an agreement in 1946 with the French, but they brought in forces. After nine years, the responsible French told us they had been wrong. In 1954, as soon as the agreement was signed, it was torn up. You said this morning we have the impression we were fooled in 1956. But it is not an impression; we were really fooled. In 1962, the Pathet Lao and the Vietnamese people signed an agreement. You tore up the agreement, and the war went on.

In brief, we have been fooled many times. People do not respect agreements.

We were not the first to violate agreements. It was you and the French who were first.

Therefore, it is my hope, but also a question, whether you will abide by what you said this morning, about good will, and respect for agreement. Therefore, I think that to create conditions for settlement, we should create some frankness in negotiations. This is in the interest of the American people. The American people have no profit in Vietnam. After ten years, you have only spent money. You have gained nothing back. They are great expenditures. Only slightly less than World War II. So it is not in your interest to prolong the war.

I think that the settlement of the war is in the interest of the American people, of the people in South Vietnam and North Vietnam, and in the interest of the relations between the people of the United States and Vietnam.

Now the hard question is how to reach a peaceful settlement. As you say, it is difficult indeed. Of course, we shall not begin today with a discussion of specific problems. Now, how to pose the questions for discussion, how to proceed, and about the timing of the negotiations as proposed by you? These are the questions to be settled first. Only then can we go into concrete negotiations. This is not the first time Minister Xuan Thuy and I have expressed our views. We said this to Am-

bassador Lodge, if you read the record. But you did not go into concrete questions. You still want to prolong the war, and to apply maximum military pressure. Please read the record again.

Mr. Kissinger: I have read it carefully.

Le Duc Tho: This is our viewpoint on your proposal:

As you have proposed, we have to agree on the problems to be discussed and on the work program. But we have a different approach to the problems. You think the first item is to discuss troop withdrawal. On this very point, we feel that you have not good will and are not prepared to settle the matter.<sup>12</sup>

It is our desire to discuss all the problems. This is our conception. Because only by discussing all problems can you come to a settlement of all problems, come to agree, come to the signature of an agreement, and then to a discussion of the implementation of the agreement.

This is our way of posing the problems.

When we pose all the problems, the ten points cover all the problems. On this basis, we shall express our views, and you your views. Then we come to agreement on how to settle in a logical way. Neither party will coerce the other party to a solution by applying pressure. Because we understand that these are now negotiations.<sup>13</sup>

The second part is how to proceed.

We understand that in all negotiations (Minister Xuan Thuy has been in many) there are public and private sessions. Has President Nixon officially appointed you to have private talks with Minister Xuan Thuy and me to settle the matter? Or will you come only from time to time to discuss matters, just to have probing? And in the public sessions, will there now be a chief negotiator?

There cannot only be private talks. In the public forum also there must be somebody to lead the talks. And beside the negotiations between the U.S. and ourselves on important problems, there are other negotiations between the four parties. For the time being, the PRG does not agree to have private talks with the Saigon Administration. This is a great obstacle, too.

The present administration of Thieu–Ky–Khiem is opposed by the people and the press of the U.S., as by the great majority of the people of South Vietnam. It is very warlike.

How can we come to a settlement with this administration? We want to have talks with people of good will. We do not refuse to talk with the people of the whole U.S. administration in Saigon.

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<sup>12</sup> Kissinger highlighted this and the next paragraph.

<sup>13</sup> Kissinger highlighted this and the next three paragraphs.



This is the situation now. For the time being, talks between the PRG and the Saigon Administration cannot be held yet. Therefore, you and we can have talks to settle all the problems we have just mentioned. Then we can both have discussions about all fundamental problems. Then agreement, and then there must still be a four-party conference too. There must be some competent leaders of delegations.<sup>14</sup>

As for the time limit you have proposed, we cannot set a time limit. If you show goodwill and serious intent, a settlement will come quickly. If you do not, discussion will be prolonged.

So in brief, our point of view is very clear. We wish you to have a correct assessment of the situation. We ourselves have a correct assessment of the situation. If you have an incorrect assessment, you will propose wrong solutions. Then the war will continue. There is no other way. We do not want the situation to develop this way. Xuan Thuy said that before and I reiterate it.

But if you continue the war, we shall have to continue to fight. This is an objective reality.

About the settlement, there are views we have to express. There are two problems between us: peace or war. We should choose one. If you choose peace, we are prepared to have it, and we do wish to come to a peaceful settlement.<sup>15</sup>

As you said, after a peaceful settlement, relations between our two countries will open a new page of history. We also wish what you said at the end of your speech this morning. It is our wish too, about relations between our two countries.

What Minister Xuan Thuy and I said this morning shows our good will.

Mr. Kissinger: I appreciate the frankness with which you spoke. I would suggest a five-minute break, and then I will have some questions so I can be sure I understand correctly.

(Ten-minute tea break)

Le Duc Tho: Have you visited South Vietnam?

Mr. Kissinger: I have been to Vietnam three times. I admire the courage and dignity of the Vietnamese people.

I am not sure whether I should call Mr. Le Duc Tho "Special Adviser" also? (Smiles all around)

Le Duc Tho: Whatever you like.

Mr. Kissinger: I would like to ask a few questions for clarification and then make a few observations.

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<sup>14</sup> Kissinger highlighted this and the next paragraph.

<sup>15</sup> Kissinger highlighted this and the next 30 paragraphs.

The point was made that the ten points encompass the totality of the problem. Does this mean that we have to accept the ten points? Or can we assume that we can discuss the totality of the problem, with each side free to pursue its own position?

Le Duc Tho: The ten points have been laid down. We shall express our views on the ten points. You will express your views on the ten points. We shall then discuss the ten points, and come to an agreement.

Mr. Kissinger: Supposing we wish to discuss our eight points, and ask for your views on them, while you have your ten points. Together we could discuss the 18 points. (North Vietnamese smiles)

Le Duc Tho: We feel that our ten points cover all problems. In expressing our views on the ten points, you can express any views you like. We will discuss and come to an agreement.

Mr. Kissinger: Let me sum up. You would express your views on the ten points; we can express our views on the eight points, and each side can discuss the other's—and so to agreement.

Le Duc Tho: Agreed.

Mr. Kissinger: I understood Mr. Le Duc Tho to say, in a sentence which did not express unqualified approbation of the Saigon administration, that Hanoi is willing to talk to all of the administration in Saigon.

Le Duc Tho: That is not so. I said that the administration of Thieu–Ky–Khiem is a great obstacle to negotiations. We have often expressed our views on this subject. We will talk with any Saigon administration, without Thieu–Ky–Khiem, which stands for peace, which has good will, and which shows a serious attitude in negotiations. We have said many times why no Thieu–Ky–Khiem.

Mr. Kissinger: I am therefore correct in understanding that the four power talks can include the government of South Vietnam without Thieu, Ky and Khiem.

Le Duc Tho: Right.

Xuan Thuy: But the important thing is that the administration without Thieu–Ky–Khiem must support peace and serious negotiations because if the Saigon administration without Thieu–Ky–Khiem applies the same policy as before, the negotiations cannot succeed.

Le Duc Tho: With such a change of people and politics, a favorable atmosphere for fruitful negotiations will be created.

Mr. Kissinger: I would like to ask one more question on this subject, and then go on to the next subject. Is this posed as a preference or as a condition?

Le Duc Tho: This is a condition. We have often expressed our views. To lead to fruitful negotiations, in the present situation, public opinion in the United States and the overwhelming majority of the

people in South Vietnam are demanding a change in that. This change will create conditions for a quicker settlement.

Mr. Kissinger: May I make one general point so that all will understand and we need not discuss it again. It concerns public opinion in the United States. It is important because we must assess the objective situation correctly.

Mr. Nixon was elected President, and is confident that he will be re-elected. And he believes that he understands U.S. public opinion better than some of the American visitors you see here from time to time. You must let us be the judge of U.S. public opinion.

Now, let me get back to my questions, and ask a question on procedure.

If I understood the discussion, it was that there be some forum for going for an overall settlement along the lines discussed, and at some point during these discussions, a four power conference would be revitalized.

Le Duc Tho: This is not so. In my view, there are two forums.

There is the public forum, the four-party forum. We think you should appoint a competent leader of the delegation to settle the matter.

Another forum are the talks with you or another fully authorized to have talks with us. Because there are problems which should be settled with you. But if you cannot come, there should be some competent person to deal with, so that the negotiations will be continuous.

Xuan Thuy: The last time, you told me Kleber should continue as it was. At the same time, you said another forum was opened concretely between you and myself. Therefore I raised a number of questions. You did not respond until now.

Mr. Kissinger: What questions?

Xuan Thuy: I told you this morning, the questions of troop withdrawals and of coalition government. Now we meet again, and I would like to recall the views you expressed in August 1969; that we agree to open another forum, between you and me. At the same time, the Kleber forum will continue as in 1969.

That means that there must be a successor to Ambassador Lodge. Because if you do not keep the promise made in August 1969, this may exert an influence on our talks here.<sup>16</sup>

As for the Saigon administration without Thieu-Ky-Khiem, this is another problem. Because you are demanding, and the Saigon administration is also demanding, that we and the PRG have private talks

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<sup>16</sup> Kissinger highlighted this and the next three paragraphs.

with the Saigon administration as now constituted. The PRG has refused this, and we have supported it. We must do that. Therefore, if we are to have private talks, Thieu–Ky–Khiem must be got rid of. We have described the reasons.

Mr. Kissinger: Yes, I understand, Mr. Minister. On the first point concerning the agenda, I see no problem. That is the point that you will talk on the basis of the ten points, and we will talk on the basis of anything we choose, including the eight points. This is no problem.

As to the second point, relating to our talks and the talks at Avenue Kleber, Minister Xuan Thuy has understood me with his usual precision. (North Vietnamese smiles) There has to be a competent forum at Avenue Kleber for discussions as soon as there is something to discuss. This can be arranged.

(Mr. Kissinger then said that since he was not a diplomat and lacked time, he would speak frankly in saying that the third point is impossible. Only the first part of this was translated into French, and none was translated into Vietnamese, as Le Duc Tho broke in.)

Le Duc Tho: This is your show of good will—to appoint a successor to Ambassador Lodge.

Mr. Kissinger: As I explained to Mr. Special Adviser Tho, we do not believe that we always have to pay—to show good will—to gain an opening of negotiations. (Le Duc Tho laughed appreciatively.) This is particularly true since we watched the negotiations between August and October and nothing new was said, certainly by your side. You have the word of the President that negotiations will not fail for lack of an appropriate U.S. representative in Paris if there is really something to discuss.<sup>17</sup>

Xuan Thuy: But what I pointed out is that the negotiations in August were not the same as now. We should return to August.

Mr. Kissinger: We want to do better.

Le Duc Tho: Since you withdrew Ambassadors Lodge and Walsh, public opinion says the U.S. is not serious.

Mr. Kissinger: I must remind Mr. Le Duc Tho that we have excluded discussion of public opinion.

Le Duc Tho: We must take it into account.

Mr. Kissinger: That is our problem.

Xuan Thuy: We have two ears and must listen.

Mr. Kissinger: We will take care of U.S. public opinion, you take care of opinion in North Vietnam.

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<sup>17</sup> Kissinger highlighted the last sentence of this paragraph.

Le Duc Tho: Okay, but we must make an assessment of U.S. public opinion, too.

Mr. Kissinger: Okay.

We have watched the negotiations at Avenue Kleber, and in his UN speech the President even recalled a statement by Minister Xuan Thuy in a press conference,<sup>18</sup> in order to show our seriousness. But there was no movement in August, September or October, and we therefore had to conclude that there was no progress at Kleber as presently constituted.

I don't think it is useful to pursue this particular line of argument very much longer. We will establish a relationship between Avenue Kleber and conversations which are going on elsewhere. And we will see to it that the proper possibilities exist if there is a real possibility for progress.

Xuan Thuy: It is a fact that there has been no progress made at Kleber for the last few months. There is a deadlock. It is not our fault. It is your fault because you withdrew the chief of your delegation. If you follow the negotiations, that is your right. We also follow them. If you continue to follow this line now, we will have a different attitude from now. Therefore, I tell you that negotiations at Kleber may have an influence on our talks here.

Le Duc Tho: We met Ambassadors Harriman and Lodge many times, both at Kleber and in private meetings. Often there was no progress made. But it comes later. Progress could have been made. But you have withdrawn your delegate suddenly. This was a way of putting pressure on us. Minister Xuan Thuy is right. You are responsible for the deadlock. Difficult problems cannot be resolved overnight. There must be many meetings, even fruitless meetings, and ultimately problems will be solved. But you left the conference. So the fault is yours.<sup>19</sup>

Mr. Kissinger: We did not leave the conference; we left a skilled and experienced diplomat there.

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<sup>18</sup> In this speech of September 18, 1969, Nixon stated: "On September 2, 1969, North Vietnam's chief negotiator in Paris said that if the United States committed itself to the principal of totally withdrawing its forces from South Vietnam, and if it withdrew a significant amount, Hanoi would take this into account." Nixon had announced on September 15, 1969, that by December 15, 1969, U.S. troop strength in Vietnam would be reduced by a minimum of 60,000 men. Nixon told the UN General Assembly that: "I repeat what I said in my speech of May 14: that we are prepared to withdraw all of our forces from Vietnam. And the replacement of 60,000 troops is a significant step. The time has come for the other side to respond to these initiatives." (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1969*, p. 727; the May 14, 1969, Address to the Nation on Vietnam is *ibid.*, pp. 369–375)

<sup>19</sup> Kissinger highlighted this paragraph.

Le Duc Tho: Mr. Habib has spoken with us many times. He is an experienced man. But he is not fully competent to settle the matter.

Mr. Kissinger: The President sent me, as high-ranking a person as he could have sent, to demonstrate our interest in a settlement.

Xuan Thuy: That is another problem. If there had not been the deadlock in the Kleber negotiations, it would have been easier for you and us to talk together. Only when Kleber is what it was in August, is there a full reason for me to remain here to talk with you. If Kleber is deadlocked, then I cannot stay indefinitely. If I leave for Hanoi, I cannot meet you every weekend.

Mr. Kissinger: The Minister is blackmailing me on the basis of my personal affection for him. (North Vietnamese smiles)

Xuan Thuy: It is you who blackmailed me first.

Mr. Kissinger: If we meet every weekend, there will be many in Washington who will be angry at me. Now, I believe we can go no farther on this subject at this meeting. I have taken careful note of what Minister Xuan Thuy said and understand. If there is any sign of progress, we will establish a rapid relationship which will enable the most elevated people on your side to deal with us. And we will think very carefully about what Mr. Le Duc Tho and Minister Xuan Thuy have said on this point.

If we have faithful negotiations, it will be in our interest to conduct them so that they will proceed as rapidly as possible.

This brings me to the most difficult point, having to do with the composition of the government in Saigon. Minister Xuan Thuy will remember that I told him in August that it would be impossible for us as an American action to change the government in Saigon. We recognize that when we discuss all problems, as Mr. Le Duc Tho has said, the outcome will have to be one which satisfies the existing political forces in South Vietnam and will reflect their relationships.<sup>20</sup>

Le Duc Tho: We'll see when we discuss this matter. We should not now enter this discussion.

Mr. Kissinger: I simply want to make clear that we are not entering these discussions with an agreement or understanding that we will change the government in Saigon.

Le Duc Tho: Negotiations are held to settle the South Vietnam problem. The parties to such negotiations are not just you and ourselves. They are the PRG and the Saigon administration. Therefore the maintenance of Thieu-Ky-Khiem makes difficult the settlement of the problem. Suppose now you really want to settle the problem, and to

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<sup>20</sup> Kissinger highlighted this and the next seven paragraphs.

withdraw your troops. Then Thieu–Ky–Khiem would have to agree, and they would not. Therefore the maintenance of Thieu–Ky–Khiem shows that you are not ready to settle.

Mr. Kissinger: There are two separate problems.

Suppose we make an agreement and Saigon opposes it—that is one problem.

The second problem is if you say in advance that the existence of the Saigon government is proof that we don't want a settlement.

With respect to the first problem, we do not ask you about your making an agreement and the NLF's not agreeing. We assume you will use your influence. The same will be true with us. (Le Duc Tho blinked slowly to show he understood.)

Now, Mr. Special Adviser, I have two observations about some points you made in your presentation.

As I had occasion to tell you outside this room, I was very impressed by what you said. I would point out only that our assessment of the situation might be wrong, but it is sincere. It is a sign of our good faith that while we sincerely believe the situation is better, we are still willing to talk on the same basis and in the same framework. (Le Duc Tho nodded his understanding.)<sup>21</sup>

I would also like to say a word about a very important question. You, Mr. Special Adviser, asked me how you can know we will observe an agreement. For all the reasons which you explained with such eloquence and power, we know that if we do not live up to an agreement, you will fight with the same tenacity and courage you have displayed before. We don't want an armistice; we want a peace which will enable our peoples to develop their relationship. Since the President will be in office seven more years, it is in our interest to deal with each other honestly.

Maybe I should speak one brief word about Laos. (North Vietnamese smiles) Although my students at Harvard say it is impossible for me to say anything briefly. (More relaxed smiles)

Le Duc Tho: You are a philosopher.

Mr. Kissinger: Mr. Le Duc Tho has said that we are trying to defeat the Pathet Lao and are increasing the intensity of the war. To us, it appears that exactly the opposite is happening. (North Vietnamese smiles) Most of the Pathet Lao we observe speak Vietnamese. (Brief smiles) We would like to maintain the 1962 agreements, and are willing to listen to any proposition which would do so. I must say frankly that the confidence we have in any agreement on Vietnam must be affected by what happens concerning the 1962 agreement on Laos.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Kissinger highlighted this paragraph.

<sup>22</sup> Kissinger highlighted this and the next three paragraphs.

Xuan Thuy: I helped to negotiate the Laos agreements in 1962, so there is all the more reason for me to understand this question.

Le Duc Tho: The limit of the line of the Pathet Lao in the 1962 Accords had been penetrated.

But that is enough for Laos for today. You have spoken about good will, sincerity, respect for agreements, and about the relations of our people after peace. We hope your deeds will match your words.

Mr. Kissinger: May I express the reciprocal sentiment?

Le Duc Tho: If you really show good will, you will be responded by good will. As I told you, we are an oppressed people. You violate agreements; we do not.

Mr. Kissinger: We will make every effort to understand your problems. We know this is hard between different cultures. You must try to understand our problems and our concerns. (Le Duc Tho nodded his understanding.)

Now, Mr. Le Duc Tho, how do we proceed from here, in your opinion?

Le Duc Tho: We have raised a number of problems. Now we will have an overall discussion of all problems. You are fully authorized by President Nixon. We, Minister Xuan Thuy and I, are fully authorized by our government to have these discussions. The time is up to you. You let us know when we shall meet again.<sup>23</sup>

Mr. Kissinger: General Walters will be away for a week, acting as interpreter for President Pompidou's visit in the U.S. Should we fix a time now, or leave this for a later arrangement?

Xuan Thuy: It is up to you to decide. If you fix a date, we shall arrange a program of work.

Mr. Kissinger: My absence from Washington is very noticeable. We would prefer Sunday to Saturday.

Xuan Thuy: Yes.

Mr. Kissinger: If I leave on Sunday, everyone will think I have a girl.

Xuan Thuy: Leave the girl somewhere, and come here for the discussions. This is a suggestion of good will.

Mr. Kissinger: As always, Minister Xuan Thuy has left out the essential element. First I need a girl friend.

Xuan Thuy: Look for one. I am told you have many.

Mr. Kissinger: On Saturday, March 14, I have a dinner from which my absence would be very noticeable. Having just said that Sunday is best, could I now propose a Monday?

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<sup>23</sup> Kissinger highlighted this and the next two paragraphs.



Le Duc Tho: All right.

Mr. Kissinger: March 16?

Le Duc Tho: All right.

Mr. Kissinger: Here?

Le Duc Tho: All right. 9:30 a.m.?

Mr. Kissinger: 9:30 a.m. would be fine.

I would like to thank you for your hospitality. I appreciate the frankness with which you spoke. I hope we can soon look back on this meeting as a turning point in the relations between our two people.

Xuan Thuy: Before coming here, I thought that you had come with something new in content. But today's meeting shows that you have nothing new in content. So we are not yet further than we are at Kleber. But now we have agreed on the forum of meeting again.<sup>24</sup>

What we have been saying today, you have said you will carefully consider. We hope your consideration will lead to future results. We hope at the next meeting you will have something new and practical in content.

Mr. Kissinger: Let me speak frankly. I am extremely busy. For me to spend all of my time on one problem is almost impossible. I am doing this only because of my own personal, and President Nixon's, intense desire to make a just and fair peace.

We told Minister Xuan Thuy in August, we stated in the communication General Walters brought to you, and I have repeated today, that you must not think these discussions are a means for the U.S. to make unilateral concessions. We will be generous and open-minded, but we hope and expect your side will meet us part of the way.<sup>25</sup>

Xuan Thuy: It seems that there is a difference of views on this also. You think you have made all the concessions and we none. So I think we should not use this word "concessions" any longer. Let us say that we shall meet each other to meet the common goal, peace.

You have a lot of work to do in Washington. So do Mr. Le Duc Tho and I in Hanoi. Paris is not my only job. The question of being busy is not a problem. The question is that of peace. The question is respect for independence, of willingness for peace.

Mr. Kissinger: Let's not argue now about what we will argue later.

(After friendly goodbyes, the meeting ended at approximately 8:00 p.m.)

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<sup>24</sup> Kissinger highlighted this and the next paragraph.

<sup>25</sup> Kissinger highlighted this and the next paragraph.

191. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

My Meeting with Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy, February 21, 1970

I met with Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy near Paris for about seven hours on February 21. It was a significant meeting. We had a frank exchange of views. They basically accepted our proposed procedure for future private meetings, dropped their preconditions for substantive negotiations, and gave the impression of being much more ready for business than before.

I will send you a separate memorandum on where we go from here.<sup>2</sup>

*I. What Happened*

—I presented our prepared statement during the almost three-hour morning session. The remainder of the morning I rebutted some of their statements, replied to questions, and had them clarify some elements of their positions.

—During the morning session, Xuan Thuy produced a very perfunctory speech full of standard accusations with some interesting omissions (see below). In the afternoon session, Le Duc Tho made a long, rather defensive speech in which he rejected my statement that our situation had improved and claimed that in fact it had deteriorated. He even claimed that we had lost the war. He then proceeded to accept most of our suggestions for the format of future meetings, and to accept some rather significant changes in their position with just a minimum of face-saving.

—The atmosphere during the meeting was remarkably frank and free of trivia. Tho readily agreed to the proposed time for the next meeting. He did not appear to have a prepared statement, suggesting that he had some latitude on which he could accept. His long speech was apparently triggered by my suggesting that our position had improved since my August meeting with Xuan Thuy.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 852, For the President's File—Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David, Sensitive, Vol. II. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. A note on the memorandum indicates that it was typed on February 21 and given to the President on February 22 by Kissinger.

<sup>2</sup> See Document 192.

## *II. What Was Agreed*

—To continue private talks in this channel.

—On that basis, to meet again on Monday, March 16, at 9:30 a.m., as the first of a series of meetings.

—To discuss all problems related to the war. They will do so on the basis of their ten points, we on the basis of anything we choose, including our eight points.

—If there is progress, we will appoint a successor to Ambassador Lodge.

It was also implicitly agreed that,

—after we have discussed all the issues, and if we reach agreement, the other parties will be brought in to ratify it. It is not clear whether this will be done at the Majestic or at some other special meeting, and it is also not clear whether and how the Majestic sessions will be coordinated with our private negotiating process.

## *III. What Was New, or Dropped*

—They dropped their demand that the GVN be changed as a precondition to substantive talks, saying that this could be discussed later. Instead, they linked the change in the GVN variously to private GVN talks with the PRG, to the ratification process, and to gestures of U.S. good will which could lead to a “rapid settlement.” They implied that the main problem was not the composition of the GVN per se but the PRG’s refusal to deal with Thieu, Ky and Khiem, and the GVN’s possible unwillingness to accept an agreement and abide by it.

—They did not use the word “unconditional” when speaking of U.S. withdrawals, and did not challenge me when I said we would discuss the withdrawal of all non-South Vietnamese forces.

—When I spoke of “reciprocity,” they did not argue. Xuan Thuy even said that we would “meet each other” on the road to peace.

—There was little emphasis on a coalition government, or any suggestion that we had to accept one as a precondition to talks.

—They stressed that they wanted an overall settlement, a “package.”

—They also stated flatly that now is the time to negotiate one.

## *IV. Significance*

It was clearly a significant meeting. While it is still very hard to assess their objectives, they seem to want very much to get some exchange of views in a private forum separate from the Majestic sessions, and they appear prepared to pay the price of dropping their preconditions and perhaps some of their more extreme demands. But our positions are still very far apart, and we must expect that once they have got us talking they will prove tough for at least a while. In the past,

the first meetings with them in a new channel have often sounded more promising than was justified by the results of later meetings.

—They have accepted a procedure which has a built-in time pressure that may work to their disadvantage. They know they cannot keep this channel going very long if they do not offer anything new. At the present frequency of meetings, they cannot get agreement in the near future unless they make some progress in at least one of every few meetings.

—They appear worried about Vietnamization, because if it succeeds they have lost and if it fails we may keep some forces there a long time.

—They showed some concern about whether we would live up to an agreement, which provides a piece of evidence that they are at least thinking ahead to the real possibility of a settlement.

—There are suggestions that they may be ready to talk seriously about troop withdrawal on a reciprocal basis.

—They are entering discussions on an overall settlement without including the PRG or insisting as a condition of talks that the Saigon government be changed—a key point for the PRG.

—This has been an important meeting, certainly the most important since the beginning of your Administration and even since the beginning of the talks in 1968. It remains to be seen what will happen next, but the early clues suggest that the course is certainly worth pursuing seriously.

—They accepted the condition for the appointment of a new Ambassador.

—Their omission of the word unconditional from their demand for U.S. withdrawal suggests that they are ready to pay some price.

—They may be in a hurry to reach some agreement, since they indicated several times that they wanted a quick settlement.

**192. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, February 27, 1970.

SUBJECT

How to Proceed in My Private Meetings with the North Vietnamese

This memorandum is to submit for your approval the general lines on which I believe we should proceed in my next meetings with the North Vietnamese in Paris.

*General Strategy*

It is essential that our method of carrying out these meetings be as different as possible from the pattern of private talks during the past two years between our representatives in Paris and those of the other side. In the past, the U.S. has shown anxiety for progress. The North Vietnamese strategy has been to question our position without allowing exploration of their own. The effect of this has been movement on our side—such as the bombing halt—while their only “concessions” have been agreements merely to talk. We have never forced them to come up with really new formulations.

This secret channel has certain assets which should help us change this pattern:

—My position is not tied to the negotiations. They know that the only way I can justify my continuing participation in these meetings is if they show real progress.

—I speak directly for you. Therefore, anything I say has a final quality.

—Since the time and frequency of our meetings is necessarily limited, if there is to be progress the talks must be to the point. There is no time for traditional maneuvering.

—If they want us to appoint a new chief negotiator in Paris, they know there has to be progress in this channel.

—They have agreed in the last meeting to talk seriously and they did not insist on pre-conditions before doing so. They cannot, therefore, consistently now ask for concessions in return for serious talks.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 852, For the President's File—Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David, Sensitive, Vol. II. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for action. An attached note by Alexander Butterfield to Nixon reads: “Mr. President—Henceforth these particularly sensitive papers will come to you in red folders—so as to be kept separate from all other. Henry or Al Haig will bring them directly to me—circumventing the Secretariat—and I will return them directly.”

*Issues*

There are basically two issues involved in the talks:

- mutual withdrawal of non-South Vietnamese military forces, which we have raised; and
- political settlement in South Vietnam, which they have raised.

Agreement with the North Vietnamese on a verifiable mutual withdrawal is in our and the GVN's fundamental interests, even if there is no political settlement. But the North Vietnamese will almost certainly not wish to withdraw their forces until they have a good idea of the shape of a political settlement, since the GVN seems at the moment to have the upper hand over the VC.

As a general line of approach in the next meetings, therefore, I propose that I put forward a precise and fairly attractive proposal for mutual withdrawal, which could be negotiated with regard to timing but would necessarily include absolute reciprocity and devices for verification. I would seek to get from them a counter-proposal on this issue and a new proposal on political settlement.

At the same time, we must recognize that they may not really want to negotiate seriously or to reach an overall settlement despite what they say. They may merely want to see if they can gain some relief from our present military and diplomatic pressure so as to keep up the fight for a longer time at a different level. But, no matter what their purpose, they apparently want to maintain this dialogue and we can perhaps now elicit answers which they might not have given us otherwise.

*Next Meeting*

In line with this strategy, in our next meeting on March 16, I believe I should begin by saying that since I am there as your spokesman, the talks must be completely serious. There is no time in our meetings for traditional maneuvering. Both sides must come quickly to the points they wish to make. If they want slow private talks, there is no point in my taking part, and we can make arrangements to carry on at a different level.

Consequently, the position which we put forward, I would say, is not an opening bargaining position. It is a forthcoming proposal from which we will move little, if at all. I would make it clear that this statement is not a bargaining tactic, but a statement of fact.

After these introductory remarks, I would ask a number of clarifying questions on their statements at our last meeting on February 21.<sup>2</sup> I would include a specific question on what they meant when Le

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<sup>2</sup> See Documents 189 and 190.

Duc Tho said, "Neither party will coerce the other party to a solution by applying pressure. Because we understand that these are now negotiations." I would also probe them on Laos.

I would then put forward a detailed mutual withdrawal proposal, stating that this is the chief thing we now have to offer. I would invite their reaction—noting again that we believe it is a forthcoming proposal from which we will move little, if at all. I would also invite them to make a proposal on political settlement, reminding them that the GVN must participate in any agreement.

I would refuse to answer their questions about our position until they had come up with a specific reaction to our mutual withdrawal proposal. Nor would I answer questions on the issue of a political settlement until they had made a serious proposal.

At the following meeting, we would be ready to answer their proposal on a political settlement, and they should be ready to answer our proposal on mutual withdrawal.

#### *The Bureaucratic Problem*

We do not have a precise negotiating position which has been agreed within the U.S. Government, or a general position agreed with the GVN. The Vietnam Working Group has moved very slowly in developing inter-agency drafts of our position since the Review Group meeting on the subject last July.<sup>3</sup> I have not wanted to press them to move faster until we could heal the wounds inflicted on the GVN by the past administration, and for fear that State would turn coordination with the GVN into a pressuring exercise. We still have to move very carefully. I will indicate to Ambassador Sullivan in low key your desire that they give us a work schedule on preparing agreed positions, so that the NSC can review where we stand some time this summer. This should stimulate action without compromising secrecy or triggering State into putting pressure on the GVN.

In the meantime, our most urgent requirement is for a precise mutual withdrawal position, if you agree to my putting forward such a proposal at the next meeting. We would need questions designed to probe their position. We also would need a counter-proposal on political settlement for the following meeting.

The positions we develop should be reasonable enough to be attractive, but strong enough so we would not have to back away from them in another more conventional negotiating channel if this one should break down.

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<sup>3</sup> See Document 96.

*Coordination with the GVN*

The lack of an agreed position with the GVN will require you to make decisions on our position which could, if later revealed, embroil us in difficulties with Saigon. This is risky, but I see no other way to proceed if we are to maintain momentum and secrecy.<sup>4</sup>

Our relations with the GVN will require us, however, to avoid making concessions on a political settlement until it is clear that there is a good chance of an agreement. In addition, we must be particularly careful in the wording of our statements on this issue.

I will discuss this problem in detail with Ambassador Bunker.

*Recommendation:* That you approve this general procedure. I will, of course, present to you for approval the detailed talking points and statements which I would propose to use.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Nixon wrote next to this paragraph: "OK, will do."

<sup>5</sup> Nixon initialed the approve option and added by hand: "Don't haggle so much over 'what did they mean by this or that'—they thrive on this kind of discussion. Come directly to the hard decisions on the two main issues & say 'we will leave details to subordinates'—otherwise you will spend two days on details & make no progress on substance. We need a breakthrough on principle—& substance—Tell them we want to go immediately to the core of *the problem*."

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### 193. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, February 27, 1970.

SUBJECT

National Security Council Meeting to Consider Public Posture on Laos

The National Security Council is meeting at 4:00 p.m. on February 27<sup>2</sup> to consider what our public posture should be on Laos in order to meet growing demands on the Hill and among the people for a

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 101, Vietnam Subject Files, President's March Statement on Laos—Background/Miscellaneous. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for action. A note on the memorandum reads: "ret'd 3-2."

<sup>2</sup> On February 26 at 9:35 a.m., Laird and Kissinger discussed the problems of U.S. covert operations in Laos. Laird told Kissinger, "It's in my budget whether it's CIA or Defense. I have to defend it." Laird reported that he had informed the House Foreign Affairs Committee about operations in Laos: "—they know the past and everything in



full explanation of the U.S. role in Laos.<sup>3</sup> State has proposed that it be authorized to accede to the request by Senator Symington for public release of the censored part of the testimony on Laos which was delivered in executive session before his Subcommittee.<sup>4</sup> Secretary Rogers believes that this step would ease the pressures to which State has been subjected by Senators Symington, Fulbright, and others on the Hill over our role in Laos, and also would be desirable in putting our actions in Laos in a good light before the American people.

### *The Problem*

So long as the Communists in Laos were willing to let the political and military balance in Laos remain roughly what it was when the 1962 Geneva Accords were signed, i.e., a standoff in Northern Laos between neutralist Prime Minister Souvanna and the Lao Government forces on the one hand against the Communist Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces on the other, with Hanoi controlling the Ho Chi Minh Trail, Laos was not the major issue for U.S. policy which it is today. Our bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail with Souvanna's consent was regarded domestically as essentially being part of the Vietnam war.

However, when the Communist's dry season offensive of 1969 in Northern Laos pushed beyond areas traditionally held by them and began to threaten the old political and military balance, both our involvement and public and Congressional attention went up. At Souvanna's request we greatly increased our tactical air strikes in the North in support of his forces, and this aid helped materially in the success of Vang Pao's counterattack in 1969, which captured the Plain of Jars. With the current Communist offensive to retake the Plain, our air strikes have increased still further, and have included B-52 as well as tacair strikes. (This air support is running at a rate of over \$500 million annually.) We have helped Souvanna not only to prevent hostile forces

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Helms' operation but they were really shocked about the increased raids in the north. It shakes them to the bottom of their feet. You know the problem there." Laird doubted there would be any leaks from the House Committee, but he could not say the same for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and he feared that the Department of State had already informed them about the operations. Kissinger stated: "If Souvanna should ask us to stop the bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which is not in his best interests, we are in trouble." Kissinger suggested a backgrounder to Republican Senators, but Laird suggested that "the whole thing is pretty much in the open" and that the Nixon administration had increased bombing sorties over Laos by 400 percent over the Johnson administration. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 362, Telephone Conversations, 1969–1976, Chronological File)

<sup>3</sup> See Document 194.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Senate, 91st Congress, 1st session, 1969, U.S. Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on U.S. Security Arrangements and Commitments Abroad, *Hearings on United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad, Kingdom of Laos*, Part 2, October 20, 22, 28, 1969.

from gaining control of the Lao Government and possibly forcing a halt in our bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, but to preserve Souvanna's legitimate neutralist government established by the Geneva Accords and maintain it as a buffer between Thailand and Communist subversion originating in North Vietnam. These actions have been misinterpreted—deliberately or otherwise—as pointing to another U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia like that in Vietnam, which the Administration is trying to cover up despite the “right” of the American people to know. The B-52 strikes and news stories about armed Americans in civilian clothes aiding the Lao Government troops have blown the issue up to major proportions.

The real issue in Laos is entirely related to Vietnam:

—There is no question but that the North Vietnamese can overrun Laos at any point in time that they care to, providing they are willing to pay the political and psychological costs of upsetting the 1962 Accords.

—Should North Vietnam overrun Laos, our whole bargaining with respect to the Vietnam conflict would be undermined. In fact, if North Vietnamese military operations in Laos succeed to the point that Souvanna believes he must succumb to their influence in order to survive, we could then anticipate that he would refuse to permit us to continue our interdiction of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and thus our military operations in South Vietnam would be catastrophically damaged.

—These are the fundamental considerations with all the rest amounting to balderdash. It is probably these fundamental points which are recognized by our domestic Vietnam war critics.

### *The Meeting*

Your purpose at the meeting will be to listen to the points of view of the principals on how we should best handle the problem of dealing with the Congress and the public, and to approve a specific procedure. I suggest that you begin by explaining your reasons for calling the meeting and what you hope to achieve. You might then:

—Call on CIA Director Helms for a brief intelligence assessment of the situation in Laos;

—Follow this by calling on Secretary Laird for a similar briefing on our military operations;

—Ask me to review the issues and the options with respect to public information policy;

—Ask Secretary Rogers to explain just what would be released if State handled it;

—Call on the principals for their opinions;

—If you desire, end the meeting by going over some of the broader policy issues which are at stake in Laos. I will be prepared to review the principal issues.

*The Issues*

—State regards the release of the Symington Subcommittee testimony as being the simplest way to do this. We might kill two birds with one stone: placate Symington, Fulbright, et al, and show the public what we are really doing.

—On the other hand, it is doubtful whether the release of the sensitive parts of the testimony will placate the Senators. They *know* what is going on in Laos, and why. The executive sessions have given them all this. Their purpose is to undermine existing commitments. Release of the Laos testimony would help serve this purpose, since the testimony was slanted in directions desired by the Committee.

—Releasing the testimony would help North Vietnam to document its case that we are violating the Geneva Accords, without admitting that it is violating them, and thus seriously undermine the real basis for our action. It would also make it more difficult for the Soviets to preserve their present relatively friendly posture towards the RLG.

—If the transcript is released uncensored, much of the work of the White House coordinating apparatus that you set up in your decision of November 6,<sup>5</sup> which has worked so effectively, will be undone. This would make future Symington hearings such as the upcoming NATO hearings vastly more difficult to control.

—Furthermore, by giving in on Laos, the Administration's stand on not releasing sensitive parts of the proceedings would be eroded with respect to other countries. We might be opening a real Pandora's box of problems for ourselves, not only domestically, but in our relations with other countries. Our good faith in preserving the sanctity of international agreements could no longer be trusted, and the usefulness of the diplomats who negotiated them would be compromised. I am particularly concerned over the reaction of the Thai, who already question our commitment to them.

—If we passively agree to publish this sensitive material, our private assurances to foreign governments that Fulbright's actions do not bind the U.S. Government lose all credibility.

—Finally, the passive action of releasing the sensitive material does not give us an opportunity to control the coverage given by the news media. The materials will simply be used to give whatever slant its users desire. We should get whatever public relations credit there is, not the Foreign Relations Committee.

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<sup>5</sup> The Ad Hoc Committee on Laos was established on December 6, 1969. The December 6 memorandum from Kissinger to Rogers, Laird, and Helms announcing the creation and describing the membership and responsibilities of the group is in the National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 LAOS.

*The Options, Pro and Con*

Basically, the options boil down to releasing the sensitive testimony, or finding some other way of getting our message to the public if this is accepted as being desirable. We might arrange a press backgrounder, either by State or the White House, or alternatively arrange private, sensitive briefings of Administration supporters on the Hill who might then help to defend the Administration's position. A review of the options follows:

1. *Releasing the testimony*

*Pro:*

—Might help to ease Congressional and public criticism of the Administration over Laos.

*Con:*

—Would involve the many disadvantages inherent in the issues outlined above.

2. *Arranging for a press backgrounder*

A. *By State*

*Pro:*

—Would allow us to control what is said, and how, without releasing sensitive information.

—Would preserve State's primary role in handling the Laos issue before the Congress and the public.

*Con:*

—Would not satisfy Senatorial criticism.

B. *By the White House*

*Pro:*

—Would allow us to control what is said, and how, without releasing sensitive information.

*Con:*

—Would bring the White House directly into the controversy before the lines are completely drawn.

—Would focus Senatorial criticism on the White House, which so far has not been the case.

3. *Arranging for private briefings of designated supporters*

*Pro:*

—Would allow our case to be made most fully on the basis of sensitive information.

*Con:*

—We could not be assured that the help of supporters would be sufficient to overcome the publicity accorded the critics of our Laos policy.

Talking points for your use at the meeting are attached (Tab A).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Attached but not printed.

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## 194. Minutes of the National Security Council Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, February 27, 1970.

### PARTICIPANTS

The President  
Vice President Agnew  
Secretary of State Rogers  
Secretary of Defense Laird  
Attorney General Mitchell  
CIA Director Helms  
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Wheeler  
Henry A. Kissinger  
Bryce Harlow  
William Watts

RN—I want to run through the Laos situation. We must think about the best way to present what we are doing. We may have to leak some information, but we have a good story to tell.

When the leaders of the Veterans groups were in the office the other day, they asked about Laos. I told them it all began in 1962 with the Accords which were violated as soon as they were signed. North Vietnam encroached into the area, and the Ho Chi Minh trail runs right through Laos. I said we had to be concerned over the possibility of an overrun. I have said we will [not] put in troops.

Kissinger—Not “will not”, but “have not”.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-109, NSC Minutes, Originals, 1970. Top Secret. Apparently drafted by Watts. Talking points for Nixon and Kissinger for this meeting are *ibid.*, NSC Meeting Folder, Feb. 27, 1970.

RN—There are no present plans to put in troops.

Rogers—No plans, but if needed we would want to get Congressional approval.

Laird—Concerning ground forces, we do insert some from time to time on the Ho Chi Minh trail.

RN—That is all right. We bomb the Ho Chi Minh trail and we will continue to do so. I say that categorically.

(CIA Director Helms then gave his briefing (attached).<sup>2</sup>)

RN—Where is the 1962 demarcation line?

Helms—To the west of present battle lines. The farthest west they have gone is into Moung Suoi.

RN—When does the rainy season begin?

Helms—It is 2 or 3 months away.

Rogers—They usually leave then and execute a pull-back.

Helms—We were surprised last year by their tactics. Vang Pao was encircled. We did get weapons in to him.

RN—Was there much weapon loss for us?

Helms—Yes. But we destroyed the ammo. We fly matériel in with helicopters or light planes.

The enemy now seems to be probing for weaknesses rather than preparing for an all-out attack. They are bringing in long-range artillery.

RN—What does the Senate know about Vang Pao?

Helms—We have briefed since 1961, including such people as Admiral Felt and Ambassadors Parsons and Brown. CIA was ordered to terminate activities [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*]. The Meo's observed restrictions placed on them. We did have case officers [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*]. The North Vietnamese did not comply with Articles II and IV, and on June 25, 1963, President Kennedy said to go back in.

RN—Have we lost anybody there?

Helms—Five CIA men have died; 4 in helicopters shot down and one by accident.

RN—The picture in the paper of the air base triggered public inquiry.

Helms—[*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] There are 53 Americans there all the time, [*1 line of source text not declassified*] in Vientiane.

Rogers—Has there been an increase in sorties?

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<sup>2</sup> Not attached.

Helms—No.

RN—Where was the 25% reduction in air activity undertaken?

Laird—It has been cut down in Northern Laos. The monthly sortie rate has gone up as follows:

1966—513

1967—458

1968—908

1969—3800

1970—3428

Rogers—This is the figure the Senate is most interested in.

RN—Why has it gone up?

Helms—The North Vietnamese upped their personnel.

Laird—Our priorities are as follows: first priority is against in-country Vietnamese; second priority is against the Ho Chi Minh trail; third priority is in support of the efforts of the Plaine de Jarres. Our in-country needs have gone down.

RN—That coincides with the bombing halt.

Rogers—But we stepped up again at the time the Plaine de Jarres was taken by us. That time we went farther.

Laird—Bill (Rogers) has a point. We did go farther than ever before.

Rogers—Yes, we escalated. At least that is what our opponents say.

Helms—But last year the enemy made a major mistake.

Rogers—Do you think the enemy could take Laos?

Helms—There is an uncertain equilibrium, and it hinges on the political situation.

Mitchell—But they have put more troops in.

Rogers—We have increased our sortie rate.

Helms—They have a major frustration over developments in Vietnam.

Rogers—They would hope to put enough heat on Souvanna to put a stop on bombing on the Ho Chi Minh trail.

RN—We don't have to stop. Do we bomb only with Laotian approval? I don't care what they say.

Wheeler—We have agreements with Souvanna on rules of engagement. Souvanna says the Ho Chi Minh trail is North Vietnamese controlled, which gives us a free hand.

Laird—If Souvanna asks us to stop, we don't have to. But the squawks here are great. We could knock off Dick Helms' operation, plus air operation.

I think Congress will concentrate on Laos this year.

RN—Where do we go for funds?

Helms—Senators Russell and Young decide.<sup>3</sup>

RN—That is no problem.

Laird—But Russell doesn't know how long he can work this way.

RN—If the Royal Laotian Government crumbles, the Thais would be psychopathic. Concerning the trail, we will continue to hit it. The Thais wanted us to send guerrillas in. There is no problem about getting into a deeper involvement in Laos. Who wants to defend it anyway. But if we move to include the Thais, then that is a real problem.

Rogers—Under the SEATO Accords, we can go the defense of Laos through the constitutional process.

RN—It would never get through the Senate.

Rogers—I am not worried about defending the Thais.

Laird—They are not strong enough to do it.

Rogers—Why do we always support people who can't defend themselves?

Laird—You can't get the Thai army to move very far from Bangkok.

Wheeler—They have weak junior leaders in the military.

RN—Where do we stand?

Rogers—We are heading to a serious problem with Congress. They are looking for an issue, and this is it. They see in it a repetition of Vietnam. A replay in escalation is occurring. Our sorties have been doubled. B-52 strikes have taken place. We look as if we are supporting at all costs, but we have refused to make anything public. We need some kind of testimony by the Administration, which is complete.

RN—But what the critics say is dishonest. How many advisers do we have in Laos?

Helms—It is not that simple. [*1 line of source text not declassified*]

Laird—The U.S. military has 229 people.

Rogers—Have any Green Berets been rehired?

Helms—There are 15 ex-Berets, under 2-year contract. But they are not Green Berets, they are not sheep dip.

Rogers—We have refused to make anything public on air sorties.

Laird—But the President did talk about that in November and December.

Rogers—That only applied to the Ho Chi Minh trail.

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<sup>3</sup> Senator Richard B. Russell (D-Georgia) and Senator Stephen M. Young (D-Ohio).



The Committee proposes to make a major confrontation. They are placing it on the ground of Executive privilege versus congressional authority. How about the air sorties? How can I defend keeping this secret?

Do we gain by failing to make this public? [*1 line of source text not declassified*] But we are running into a credibility problem.

Mitchell—If you get a statement out, will that turn off Symington?

Rogers—No. He would just release more testimony.

Mitchell—But that just opens Pandora's box. The testimony must come out of the Executive branch.

Rogers—This can go out of the testimony. They always have been concerned over Executive privilege.

Laird—There has been only one B-52 strike on the Plaine. We hit the Ho Chi Minh trail every day.

Whatever we do, it will not quiet the people on Laos. How we handle this is a major issue of credibility of this Administration.

I see 7 or 8 ways to handle things:

(1) Let Symington release it. This would look like the Committee smoked it out.

(2) Have a State backgrounder, or even on the record.

Rogers—You can't try to resist Symington and Fulbright and yet leak the story. That would lead to a real fight.

Laird—That depends on how much you give. It didn't necessarily help to talk about the Ho Chi Minh trail.

(3) Brief selected members of Congress. This is no good since they all know anyway.

(4) Continue to hard-line.

(5) Issue a new government statement, as a follow-up to the Presidential speeches of December and January.

(6) Make a new statement, plus a backgrounder which could be done by State or Henry.

(7) Let the Royal Laotian Government put out a statement first and then we follow-up.

Rogers—If we go along the lines of #7, that would be a catastrophe.

Laird—We could announce something together.

Honestly, I only like #5. I think we need a new statement. I have several suggested drafts. I am not concerned about quieting interest on Laos but on our credibility.

Rogers—I agree—just as we were successful in Vietnam when the President came out publicly. So if we tell a good story here it will quiet down. Why hide everything?

Laird—I agree. We should come out. We can point to this as an adjunct to the war in Vietnam—part of helping the overall situation.

RN—I did imply that in December; now we must get it out. We can't have testimony saying CIA is involved. [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*]

Rogers—I can get by without mentioning CIA.

Helms—[*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*]

Laird—One unit is ready to go.

Rogers—We can get Souvanna to say he asked for them, and that this was done at his request.

RN—Yes, to uphold the Geneva Accords.

Rogers—And I can say we have no combat troops there.

RN—We have [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] advisors.

Kissinger—Do we have advisors with the Royal Laotian Government?

RN—[*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] military men, but none have been in combat and none killed.

Wheeler—We did lose some crew at a radar station.<sup>4</sup> [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*]

Helms—I am not sure about that.

Rogers—I think we can get the Committee to go along with sorties, [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*]. When a release is made the President can make a policy statement. He can point to no escalation.

Kissinger—I see two problems. First, what should we make public? Second, what about the material the Symington Committee has?

On the Symington Committee release, we can make a deal with the air sorties kept in, but the critics will keep after the CIA story. Others will go after it as well.

Laird—We have other committees who already know about it. We must go with an Administration statement.

Rogers—That is no problem; we can work this out with Congress.

Laird—But don't give sortie levels.

Rogers—I thought you said that was okay.

Laird—No. The number business is dangerous.

Rogers—We shouldn't do this on a background basis. We should go to the committees openly, and be forthright.

RN—Who goes first? I think we should go first. We don't want to give an impression that we were withholding something. This has been going on for 6 years.

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<sup>4</sup> Eleven "contract" employees were killed at the radar and navigation site 85 at Phou Pha Thi, Laos, in March 1968 when it was captured by the North Vietnamese. See *Foreign Relations, 1964–1968*, vol. XXVIII, Document 342.

Harlow—To the degree the Committee report can be sanitized, you should go talk with the Committee.

Rogers—Symington knows everything.

Laird—The Symington Committee should not have all that.

Harlow—Symington is up for reelection and he will keep after this. So will Fulbright who is sure you preempted the Vietnam issue with your speech.

The major interest is on the ground and CIA. Symington is giving the impression of an enormous covert effort, on the edge of becoming a new Vietnam.

You could say to Symington that we will give you the most sanitized version within national security interests. We can't go further, in fairness to your colleagues. But Symington wants a confrontation with the President.

He brought up with me at lunch the issue of the Philippines [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*].

Laird—I see Symington embarrassed by having this conversation laid on the table. He is all bent out of shape.

RN—Of course, we will continue to talk. If we do something, we must get our story out. If the Symington Committee goes out first, that is an insult to the other committees.

Mitchell—Again, the credibility gap.

RN—We must lay it out. We will not disclose CIA activities. On sortie rates, I think people are more worried about ground involvement.

Laird—It costs \$2 billion, including Northern Laos and the Ho Chi Minh trail.

Rogers—Why do you refuse to tell the sortie rate?

Helms—Why not admit bombing Northern Laos at the request of Souvanna.

Laird—For a long time Souvanna did not want that.

Rogers—But that has changed now. What do I say when we assert Executive privilege?

Kissinger—You are not claiming Executive privilege, but the national interest.

Rogers—It is the same thing.

Mitchell—On the sortie rate question, why do you need the number?

Rogers—Why not?

Mitchell—Can't you say that we increased when Souvanna asked, because of the increase of North Vietnamese troops.

Harlow—I assumed there was a military reason for not giving sortie numbers.

Laird—We can announce daily rates.

RN—When Souvanna came here I was told not to announce sortie rates.

Helms—State didn't want it done. They felt this would embarrass Souvanna and might bring the Soviets in, claiming violation of the Accords.

Rogers—We could work that out. We could announce something with Souvanna.

Helms—We have deliberately held news of the increased North Vietnamese troops quiet.

Laird—The cost has gone up from \$500 million to \$2 billion during this Administration. But we can ride that out.

Kissinger—We can take a position which could include the following points:

(1) Assert that North Vietnamese troops are there and admit that our own activity is underway.

(2) There has been escalation from the other side.

(3) Enormous pressure has come on Souvanna.

(4) But the focus of attention will shift to ground operations, and a fear that we are going to war through CIA.

We must stress we are trying to negotiate a settlement in Vietnam. With respect to the public, we need to keep a low level.

With respect to Hanoi, we need ambiguity. I worry about too much explicitness. We should tell the story. Show a good reason, but with restraint.

Rogers—I agree with most of that. But this was done in the Vietnam speech. The statement must be made by the President.

Harlow—This all makes sense. We should preempt the area. It should be brief.

Laird—I have some draft suggestions.

Mitchell—What about the bombing on the Chinese road?

Wheeler—That was not done. You could say with assurance that there is no use of ground troops in Laos.

RN—There are no ground forces, and there will be none without going to Congress. That takes care of North Vietnam, Congress, and the public.

Wheeler—You can't defend Laos from Laos. You must go to North Vietnam to do that and you must go in through Thailand.

RN—I agree. That is insane.

Wheeler—There were proposals earlier to put troops in the panhandle. I was opposed.

RN—Laos is a country where there are more elephants than people. There are 2 million elephants and 1-1/2 million people. That is one country where the Republicans are in the majority.

Rogers—I can delay testifying until next week.

RN—I want to think about this over the weekend. We should make a statement next week. A backgrounder won't work—it looks tricky. On the Committee business, if we give to Symington the others will be damned mad. They have kept quiet in the past. The method is either to bite, or respond to questions.

Rogers—How about five minutes on television?

RN—I could go on at night. But that would spread to 70 million people what only 10 million people are worried about. I could give a 5 minute statement in the middle of the day—low-key.

Should I make it live like the withdrawal statement?

Harlow—This is not that kind of an issue.

RN—We must line up the troops. We must write in a simply way. There is a lot of confusion on this. I don't want any questions left.

What about Souvanna?

Rogers—I can let him know.

RN—I was going to have a press conference Monday. Now I won't.

All of you please try your hand at talking points, and let me have them by the first of next week, by Monday p.m. Set forth the points I should make and the points I should avoid.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> On March 6 the White House released from Key Biscayne, Florida, a "Statement About the Situation in Laos." The text is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pp. 244–249; see also Document 197.

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## 195. Memorandum From President Nixon to his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>

Washington, March 2, 1970.

Bill Rogers raised a very pertinent point when he asked why it is that those forces trained by Communists seem to have a will to fight whereas those that are trained by the United States usually are pretty sad.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 144, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, March 1970. Confidential. The memorandum is unsigned.

Of course, there are exceptions to this proposition. The UAR pilots are pitiful and the South Koreans turned out to be rather effective. On the other hand, I wonder if our whole training program doesn't need to be examined. This brings me back to the fundamental concern I have with regard to Vietnamization. I feel that Abrams et al are putting too much emphasis on building the image of the U.S. division with a huge division slice rather than building it as the North Vietnamese have built theirs, lean and strong and effective. I want a study made of this situation and I do not want simply a rationalization and defense from those involved.<sup>2</sup> I think we have to get to the heart of this proposition if we can.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In a March 3 covering memorandum to Kissinger, Haig stated that "attached is one of those extremely troublesome memos from the President." Haig was "especially disturbed at the President's misunderstanding of General Abrams' concepts and style. Of all the generals that I have observed, he has the best grasp of how to conduct guerrilla warfare and hopefully how to structure the force to do so." Haig suggested that the study Nixon asked for "is the kind DOD has conducted wholesale over the past eight years under the Democratic Administration." Haig also suggested that the President should know that Vietnamization emphasized the development of RF/PF and PS/DF rather than additional ARVN conventional forces. (Ibid.) Haig asked Lynn to task Defense with the study, but warned that Lynn would have to make sure that the report was responsive to the President and not just DOD "rationalizations." (Memorandum from Haig to Lynn, March 6; *ibid.*)

<sup>3</sup> In a March 3 memorandum to Nixon, Kissinger responded to a request from the President about the truth of a CBS report on February 15 that ARVN was "cursed" privately and "patronized" publicly by U.S. forces. While admitting that there was some substance to the charge, Kissinger suggested it was a distortion to say it held true for all relations between U.S. forces and ARVN. Good relations were seldom newsworthy. Kissinger reported that Defense was studying ARVN pay and support for dependents as a factor in motivation and desertion rates. Nixon wrote the following note: "K. Let's watch this closely—we cannot let a failure in this area to cause us to lose the game."

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**196. Memorandum From the Deputy Director for Plans of the Central Intelligence Agency (Karamessines) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, March 6, 1970.

SUBJECT

Further Developments Concerning the Plans and Intentions of the Cambodian Ambassador to the United Nations

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 84, Kissinger Office Files, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Sambath [Cambodian Ambassador to United Nations]. Secret; Eyes Only.

1. I am forwarding for your attention the following recent information concerning Huot Sambath, the Cambodian Ambassador to the United Nations, whom you have agreed to meet informally.

2. According to [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] educator with whom this Agency is in touch, Ambassador Sambath returned to New York from France on 25 February 1970. Sambath stated he had several conversations with Prince Sihanouk and his advisers. When informed of your agreement to meet Sambath, the Prince expressed his pleasure and instructed Sambath to proceed. In describing this development, Sambath told [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] educator: “We have diplomatic relations of a sort but we want friendly relations as well.”

3. On 27 February, Ambassador Sambath prevailed upon [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*], to telephone the White House to request an appointment. Although [*name not declassified*] stressed his personal reluctance to become involved in a governmental affair, Sambath argued that his English proficiency is poor and he did not desire to rely upon members of his office staff for fear the matter would become known at the United Nations and among employees of the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. [*1½ lines of source text not declassified*]

4. When he telephoned the White House, [*name not declassified*] eventually was put in touch with Mr. Young of your office. It was agreed the appointment would be set sometime during the period 1–6 April<sup>2</sup> and that the precise date would be fixed after further consultation on 23–25 March. [*2 lines of source text not declassified*] During his visit to Washington Sambath will also call upon Senator Mansfield, Senator Fulbright, Congressman Zablocki and Mr. Robert McNamara. The purpose of these visits is not known at this time.

[*2 paragraphs (24 lines of source text) not declassified*]

**TH Karamessines**

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<sup>2</sup> A marginal note reads: “set lunch 6th April.”

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## 197. Editorial Note

On March 6, 1970, President Nixon released from the White House in Key Biscayne, Florida, a statement entitled, “About the Situation in Laos.” The text of the statement is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pages

244–249. Nixon announced that “in light of increasingly massive presence of North Vietnamese troops and their recent offensives in Laos,” he was writing British Prime Minister Wilson and Soviet Premier Kosygin as co-chairmen of the 1962 Geneva Conference for their help in restoring the 1962 agreements. Nixon’s letters to Kosygin and Wilson, both March 6, are in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 101, Vietnam Subject Files, Laos Statement, Vol. II. The President reported in the statement that there were 67,000 North Vietnamese troops in Laos and 30 North Vietnamese regular battalions with tanks, armored cars, and long-range artillery currently involved in a campaign attacking the Plain of Jars. The Pathet Lao’s role was “insignificant.” After reviewing events in Laos from 1962 to 1969, Nixon explained that there were no American combat troops and no plans to introduce them, but there were 616 Americans employed by the U.S. Government in Laos and 424 U.S. Government contractors. Of the 1,040 U.S. military and civilian employees, military advisers or trainers comprised 320 and logistics personnel comprised 323. No American had been killed in ground combat operations, and U.S. personnel had not increased in the past year while North Vietnam increased its forces by 13,000. Nixon reported that the United States provided, at the Lao Government’s request, military assistance to its regular and irregular forces. The United States continued air operations on a first priority to interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and secondly to reconnoiter and provide combat support for Royal Lao Government forces. The President ended with a promise to continue the search for peace in Laos on the basis of the 1962 Geneva Agreements.

On February 27 Kissinger and the President discussed this statement and agreed that before making it the President should write to the Geneva Co-Chairmen, the Soviet Union and Great Britain. Kissinger suggested that the President should tell the American people about the letters and give them the facts about what “both sides” were doing. Nixon stated that “the main thing is to nail this—Kennedy did this, and Kennedy did that.” Kissinger added: “and get Harriman in there.” The President responded: “More Harriman than Kennedy. I will say that they’ve [North Vietnam] stepped up from 40 thousand to 70 thousand.” The President did not want a long statement, noting that “It’s a Washington story—people in Oklahoma know nothing about Laos.” Kissinger added that “you should not be talking about wars all the time.” The President stated that “we want to make it clear we have no combat forces in Laos. No one cares about [B] 52 strikes in Laos. But people worry about our boys.” Kissinger thought that was the problem with the CIA. Nixon responded: “We won’t mention that. We can put out some silly figure and they are there—I’ll have to fuzz their capacity. Non-combatative and none killed. That’s the only way you can show they are non-combat.” (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division,



Kissinger Papers, Box 362, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File) On March 4 at 9:45 p.m. Kissinger and Nixon again discussed the statement. Nixon stated, "If we had left the statement for them [Department of State] to make it would have been an utter disaster—whining, defensive. You can't win on a situation like this without hitting it on the head, if you are going to have to hit it." Kissinger suggested that this was the lesson of Nixon's November 3, 1969, speech and that "we have a good case on this [Laos]." The President agreed. Kissinger suggested that the North Vietnamese "are moving in Laos to stampede us in Paris. I like the line you are taking because it will help us in Vietnam." Nixon agreed and suggested, "what we are really saying is, all right boys, yes we are, what of it. State did not want us to take that tone?" Kissinger stated, "I know what they wanted us to say, we are not going to do it any more." (Ibid., 2–9 March 1970)

When released on March 6, the Nixon statement resulted in criticism from Congressional critics of the war, pointed questions from the press corps, and leaked stories about the extent of U.S. operations in Laos and the number of pilots lost and combat deaths. Press Spokesman Ron Ziegler had to qualify the President's statement that no Americans had been killed in ground combat operations. On March 9 Kissinger told Haldeman that "I knew it wasn't true [no ground combat deaths]. The President should have never made the statement." Haldeman thought that "It should have been made by State." Kissinger complained that "they never volunteered any information and gave us no warning. Laird gave us one of his fudged statements and Rogers, as for the Nov 3 [1969] statement, we didn't hear from. Nevertheless, I'm here to prevent that sort of thing." (Transcript of telephone conversation between Kissinger and Haldeman, March 9, 8 p.m.; *ibid.*, Box 362, 2–9 March 1970)

On March 7 the Pathet Lao outlined on the Vietnamese news service its terms for a political settlement in Laos including five extended points which can be summarized as: respect for Laos' sovereignty, neutrality and integrity; a neutral foreign policy for Laos; respect for the monarchy and democracy through free elections; a consultative political conference prior to elections to create a provisional government; and unification based on consultations among the Lao parties without resort to force. The text of the statement is in Foreign Intelligence Broadcast Service No. 51, Hanoi international service in English, March 6, 1631 Greenwich mean time. It is attached to a March 7 memorandum from Kissinger informing the President that while the Pathet Lao statement "was much more moderate in tone than previous statements," it included for the first time a "definite scenario ('provisional political conference' to create a 'provisional coalition government' followed by elections) for a political settlement in Laos." Kissinger concluded that, "The present proposal can hardly be seriously offered, since it calls

upon Souvanna to throw all his cards first, and does not offer a scenario for negotiations which could have the slightest appeal to him.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 19, President’s Daily Briefs)

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## 198. Memorandum of Conversation<sup>1</sup>

Washington, March 8, 1970, 9:30 a.m.

### PARTICIPANTS

Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker  
Henry A. Kissinger

### *Meetings with North Vietnamese of February 21*

Mr. Kissinger had given Ambassador Bunker the night before a copy of the transcript of the meetings on February 21;<sup>2</sup> Ambassador Bunker had gone over it and made written notes.

Mr. Kissinger asked Ambassador Bunker’s impressions. The Ambassador said that he was very encouraged—this was the most forthcoming approach in his experience, “by a good deal.” He said that he thought Mr. Kissinger’s comments on our not agreeing to the overthrow of Thieu were strong enough, and he found it interesting that they acquiesced when Mr. Kissinger said that we assumed they would use their influence with the PRG after an agreement just as we would use ours with the GVN. They had gotten the point that there would be a GVN at that time.

Ambassador Bunker also found significant the fact that they said that “for the time being” talks between the PRG and the Saigon administration cannot be held. He was further encouraged by the fact that Le Duc Tho proposes to stay in Paris.

He was also impressed by the atmosphere of the meeting which, he said, indicated that they want to move forward.

Ambassador Bunker said he thought that the North Vietnamese are not so sure Vietnamization won’t work. And he agreed with Mr.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 852, For the President’s File—Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. II. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only.

<sup>2</sup> Documents 189 and 190.

Kissinger's point that they fear the consequences if it doesn't work, since that could mean American troops will be there for a long time.

The Ambassador said he also thought that Mr. Kissinger's statements that a political solution must reflect the existing political realities in South Vietnam and that a fair political process must register the existing relationship of political forces had sunk in.

He found further encouragement in the fact that they had agreed for the first time to discuss both the 10 and the 8 points.<sup>3</sup> He agreed with Mr. Kissinger on the significance of their saying only that we should discuss the 10 points, and not insisting that we accept them.

In addition to these points, the Ambassador agreed with the following encouraging signs listed by Mr. Kissinger:

—They did not take exception to Mr. Kissinger's use of the word "reciprocity."

—They did not use the word "unconditional" in referring to American withdrawal.

—They did not insist that the GVN be changed before serious negotiations.

—They based their argument for dropping Thieu, Ky and Khiem primarily on the grounds that the PRG would not now agree to talk with the GVN.

—They did not lay emphasis on coalition government, or talk about the provisional government before elections.

—They allowed Mr. Kissinger to make the appointment of a new chief of delegation conditional on progress in this channel.

—They indicated a desire for more frequent meetings, and let us choose the time for the next meeting.

—They have accepted a procedure for negotiations in which it would be difficult for them to pursue their usual tactics, since progress must be shown.

—On the Monday after the meeting,<sup>4</sup> Mai Van Bo thanked French Foreign Minister Schuman for helping with the arrangements for Mr. Kissinger's trip. Bo said that Mr. Kissinger unfortunately had been very tough, but nevertheless the talks would continue. This was encouraging, and if the French leak it, it won't hurt us with the GVN.

In short, Ambassador Bunker said, he found "every aspect encouraging."

#### *Approach at the Next Meeting*

Mr. Kissinger described the assets we have in this channel:

—He speaks with the President's direct authority.

—The North Vietnamese can't kick him around, since his personal position does not depend on progress in the negotiations.

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<sup>3</sup> See footnote 8, Document 189.

<sup>4</sup> Monday, February 23.

—There must be progress in this channel if they are to get a new U.S. Ambassador at the talks.

—We will not follow the usual approach, but will state a position and stick with it.

Mr. Kissinger then summarized the statement he proposed to use at the meeting, subject to the President's approval.<sup>5</sup> He said that the basic objective is to get their agreement to the principle of reciprocity in the withdrawal of non-South Vietnamese forces. If they accept this principle, we have passed a fundamental turning point. We should not get bogged down in details. Ambassador Bunker agreed. He noted that we should not flood Hanoi with proposals.

Ambassador Bunker specifically agreed with Mr. Kissinger's (1) stating our acceptance of the principle of total withdrawal, (2) presenting a schedule showing what a U.S. withdrawal in 16 months would look like, (3) stating our understanding of their special problem with linking their withdrawals to ours, (4) asking them for a separate schedule for their withdrawal, (5) saying there should be means of verification and an exchange of POWs, and (6) stating that if there were agreement in principle the technical issues could be discussed at the Majestic. (Mr. Kissinger noted that this approach would enable them to save face, since there would not appear to be exact mutuality, and it would give them a tougher problem since they would have to respond or be open to blame for blocking progress. In addition, we could always hold out for something different when they came back with their proposal.)

Mr. Kissinger said that this was all he intended to do at the meeting. He would say nothing about political settlement except to ask questions, if they raise the subject, and reiterate that we will not overthrow Thieu. He would then inform Ambassador Bunker, who could inform Thieu, of what was said on political settlement, in accordance with our understanding with Thieu. If the North Vietnamese accepted the principle of mutual withdrawal, the question of a political settlement should fall into place somehow. Agreement on this principle would put heat on the NLF to reach agreement with the GVN on political issues.

Ambassador Bunker said he thought the whole approach was "very good tactics."

Mr. Kissinger said that he wanted to be sure that Ambassador Bunker was not agreeing reluctantly. Ambassador Bunker said, "on the contrary," he was whole-heartedly in accord.

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<sup>5</sup> The President approved the statement; see Document 200 and footnote 3 thereto.

*Informing President Thieu*

Mr. Kissinger suggested that Ambassador Bunker give Thieu the essence of the transcripts of the February 21 meetings.<sup>6</sup> He should inform Thieu that it was the President's wish that he receive this information. Ambassador Bunker said that he would call Thieu's attention particularly to Mr. Kissinger's strong statement to the North Vietnamese that we were not entering the discussions with an agreement or understanding that we will change the government in Saigon.

With regard to informing Thieu of our approach at the next meeting, Mr. Kissinger said that he thought we should be as candid as possible. We would leave it to Ambassador Bunker to judge the amount of detail into which he should go. He should inform Thieu that we will not let the North Vietnamese use the negotiating process to overthrow him.

Mr. Kissinger said that the Ambassador should emphasize to Thieu that Thieu and Bunker are the only two people in Saigon who know of this, and Thieu should mention it to no one, including other Americans. Ambassador Bunker said that we can trust Thieu not to talk about it. He kept his promises to be silent about secret negotiations in 1968.

*Thieu's Probable Reaction*

Ambassador Bunker said that he thought Thieu would be encouraged by these moves. He knows that while Vietnamization can lead to the end of the war for us, it does not mean the end of the war for him. This is why he has been publicly taking a harder line recently. He is thereby steeling his people for a longer struggle, and is trying to overcome the effect of Big Minh and Senator Don in lessening the resolve of the Vietnamese people. (Thieu had, however, handled the Chau case badly.)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In backchannel message 331 from Saigon, March 11, Bunker reported to Kissinger that he informed Thieu of the February 21 meetings with Xuan Thuy and Le Duc Tho. Thieu agreed to tell no one else. Bunker told Thieu of the "encouraging signs" and informed him that Kissinger would meet again with the North Vietnamese on March 16 to discuss mutual withdrawal, reciprocity, and to ask for a schedule of total withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces. Bunker assured Thieu that nothing would be said about the political structure in South Vietnam and Kissinger would state again that he would not agree to the overthrow of Thieu. Bunker asked if Thieu agreed with this strategy. Thieu replied, "by all means" and suggested that the problem "was to find out what the other side wants and how they will react." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 852, For the President's File—Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. III)

<sup>7</sup> According to a March 5 memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, Tran Ngoc Chau, a South Vietnamese Deputy in the National Assembly, was being prosecuted by the GVN for alleged Communist connections through his brother, Tran Ngoc Hien, a senior North Vietnamese official sent south in 1965 to explore the idea of coalition government. Tran Ngoc Hien was later captured in Saigon in 1969. Chau claimed he was trying to get his

Thieu knows that while Vietnamization has gone well so far, there are problems ahead for the GVN and for Thieu himself. Thieu therefore hopes that things will go well now so that the other side will come to terms.

Thieu will therefore be “reassured” by Mr. Kissinger’s meetings with the North Vietnamese.

While Thieu has the “usual Vietnamese suspicious nature,” he has great confidence in the President. The President’s meetings with him at Midway and during the Asian trip, and the November 3 speech,<sup>8</sup> helped build this confidence.

Mr. Kissinger asked if Thieu would be bothered by Mr. Kissinger’s statements that a political solution must reflect the existing political realities in South Vietnam and that a fair political process must register the existing relationship of political forces. These statements mean that both Thieu and the NLF must have a role. Ambassador Bunker said that Thieu would not be bothered by these statements; he is committed to the same position.

#### *Knowledge of Meetings within the American Government*

Ambassador Bunker agreed with Mr. Kissinger’s doubts about the wisdom of spreading knowledge of his meetings with the North Vietnamese. In addition to the dangers of leaks, knowledge of the meetings would lead to increased pressure for a flood of initiatives such as ceasefire. They agreed, however, that at some point we should bring in a selected and very limited number of people. Mr. Kissinger said that he thought the Secretary of State should be informed, perhaps after two more meetings.

#### *Arrangements for Keeping Bunker Informed*

Ambassador Bunker said that he had set up a special procedure for backchannel messages on this subject. Only one man in Saigon, [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*], knows the code. Mr. Kissinger said that he would send Ambassador Bunker a brief account of the next meeting through this channel by the morning of March 18, Saigon time, and would then send him a full account by courier. He would probably use a code for names in these messages. (This code would be as

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brother to defect, but Thieu pursued his prosecution with single mindedness to demonstrate his opposition to a coalition with the Communists. When Thieu pressured the National Assembly to lift Chau’s parliamentary immunity and try to convict him *in absentia*, Chau went into hiding. Bunker spoke twice to Thieu about the case, suggesting it was hurting U.S. support of Thieu, but with little effect. (Ibid., Country Files, Box 144, Vietnam, March 1970)

<sup>8</sup> Regarding Nixon’s Midway Island meeting with Thieu, June 7–9, 1969, see Documents 79–81. For the November 3, 1969 speech, see Document 144.

follows: Kissinger=Luke, Xuan Thuy=Yul, Le Duc Tho=Michael, Mai Van Bo=Nestor, General Walters=Xerxes.)

### *Troop Withdrawals*

Ambassador Bunker said that he thought the next troop withdrawal should be for about 50,000 men. Mr. Kissinger asked if he favored such a withdrawal. Ambassador Bunker said that he did, if it were spread over four months. Mr. Kissinger said that he had been told that it might damage the military situation. Ambassador Bunker said that the Vietnamese expect us to withdraw about 150,000 troops this year, and two more increments of 50,000 each during the year would be acceptable.

Mr. Kissinger asked if his conversations with the North Vietnamese provide a reason for holding withdrawals down. Ambassador Bunker said that perhaps they do. Mr. Kissinger said that he himself would therefore favor holding off, but “hell would break loose” if we did. Ambassador Bunker agreed.

Mr. Kissinger said that he could tell Ambassador Bunker in great confidence that the President is thinking of making the next increment 20,000 men over a two month period. Ambassador Bunker said that he would prefer this to 50,000 over four months.

Ambassador Bunker recalled that Thieu was the one who had first mentioned the figure of 150,000 men to be withdrawn during the course of 1970. Mr. Kissinger suggested that he might have been saving face. Ambassador Bunker agreed, but said that Thieu had volunteered that the President should decide whether to announce the 150,000 at the beginning of the year or do it in stages. He noted also that the South Vietnamese want us to follow the three criteria.

### *Military Situation*

In response to Mr. Kissinger’s question, Ambassador Bunker said that General Abrams is doing what he can to keep on the pressure, and that there is no indication of contrary orders from Defense.

**199. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, March 13, 1970.

## SUBJECT

Special Prisoner of War Committee

I have been considering various ways of setting up the action-oriented team on prisoners of war which you wish to have established within the White House, and believe that the most effective and efficient way to accomplish this purpose is to set up a committee composed of members of all Departments and Agencies concerned with the POW issue to meet regularly under the chairmanship of a member of my staff. In this way White House direction can be assured without the administrative problems connected with creating an entirely new office within your staff, and new ideas and concepts can be put forward without running up against the frequently stultifying inter- and intra-agency clearance process.

This committee, which could come into existence almost immediately, could be created by calling on each of the Departments and Agencies now concerned with POW affairs to nominate one or two representatives, depending on the extent to which it has been involved in this particular aspect of our operations. For example, Defense might nominate two people, one from the office of the Special Assistant to the Joint Chiefs for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities and one from ISA; State one individual who has experience in POW affairs; CIA one person familiar with Southeast Asian operations; and USIA one person with psychological warfare background. Support staff would be supplied by the NSC.

The charter of the committee would be to function both in the overt and clandestine field in all ways which could put pressure on Hanoi. Overtly, it would assure that a hard-hitting series of statements on POWs is drafted for the Paris talks,<sup>2</sup> it would consider contacts with

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 94, Vietnam Subject Files, U.S. POWs in North Vietnam to April 30, 1970. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for action.

<sup>2</sup> On February 27 Nixon read a summary account of the 56th session of the Paris Peace Talks in which the third-ranking North Vietnamese and NLF officials refused to respond to Habib's questions on POW issues, especially mail privileges. Nixon wrote the following comment: "K. I have changed my mind—From now on until further direction from me—Habib is to talk *only* about prisoners. In the meantime get Thieu to move on unilateral release [of some POWs held by South Vietnam]." (Ibid., Box 18, President's Daily Briefs) Kissinger sent Rogers instructions to this effect on March 3. (Ibid.,



foreign governments as appropriate, and it would coordinate efforts to achieve inspections of POW facilities, exchange of mail and packages, release of name lists, and release of sick and wounded POWs. This would, of course, be in accordance with consultations with State and Defense. On the clandestine side, it would undertake to exercise jurisdiction over the various efforts of CIA and Armed Forces units to free our POWs. It might also see that contacts are maintained with “peace” groups which have opened up some degree of access to POWs in North Vietnam. It would propose and regulate psychological operations of both a “black” and overt nature.

I have drafted a memorandum to the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Director of Central Intelligence and the Director of USIA (Tab A)<sup>3</sup> which informs them of your decision to implement the plan described above and directs them to nominate personnel.

*Recommendations:*<sup>4</sup>

That you approve the plan outlined above.

That you authorize me to issue the memorandum at Tab A.

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RG 59, Central Files 1970–1973, POL 27–14 VIET S) In a March 14 memorandum to the President, Kissinger reported that at the 57th and 58th plenary meetings of the Paris Peace Talks, Habib talked only about POWs. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 94, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam—U.S. POWs in North Vietnam to April 1970)

<sup>3</sup> Tab A, a March 24 memorandum signed by Kissinger, is attached but not printed.

<sup>4</sup> Nixon approved both recommendations on March 23.

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## 200. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

My Meeting with North Vietnamese on March 16

My meeting with the North Vietnamese on February 21 contained a number of new elements which indicate that they are serious in their

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 852, For the President's File—Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. II. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. A handwritten note on the memorandum indicates it was typed on March 16.

approach to our next meeting. (My memorandum of February 22 listing these elements is at Tab B.)<sup>2</sup>

We cannot yet conclude that they have made a decision to seek a negotiated settlement now. They may be on a diplomatic reconnaissance, exploring our position before they make a decision. Or they may be looking only for a means to reduce our military pressure so they can continue the conflict at length. But their readiness to engage in talks without insisting on pre-conditions—and in a channel in which they can neither make public propaganda nor stall too long—suggests that this is a serious effort. We may have a chance for a real negotiation.

Our next meeting in the channel will therefore be very important.

### 1. *Strategy at the Meeting*

In the past negotiations, the usual strategy of both sides has been to put forward initially positions each knew would be unacceptable, for bargaining purposes. This has led to lengthy and usually pointless debates and maneuvers.

In addition, we have usually reached the position we would put forward by seeking a bureaucratic consensus. This has meant that we began with very complicated positions which we then had to jettison, losing sight of the most fundamental issues in the process.

With the opportunity for serious negotiations now in this channel, we need a new approach which can help us move quickly to the fundamental issues.

#### (a) *Objective*

From our viewpoint, there is one issue to which all others are subordinate—*reciprocity* in the withdrawal of non-South Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam (and foreign troops from Laos and Cambodia). Our first objective must be to reach agreement on reciprocity in principle or in fact. Once they have done so, they will have given up their claim to moral superiority and can no longer argue privately that their forces are in South Vietnam on a different moral and legal basis than ours. This would be a quantum jump in the negotiations.

There has been a special problem in the past in gaining their agreement to the principle of reciprocity, which was their belief that they could not accept reciprocity publicly. On the basis of your statement last May 14 that “If North Vietnam wants to insist that it has no forces in the South, we will no longer debate the point,” I believe we should move for private acknowledgement of the principle rather than public recognition.

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<sup>2</sup> Document 191.

(b) *Tactics*

I believe the best way to gain their agreement on this issue is by the following:

- telling them we accept the principle of total withdrawal (as stated in your UN speech and in my last meeting with them);
- offering a specific timetable for U.S. withdrawal, without proposing a timetable for theirs;
- pointing out that we will not withdraw unless they do;
- saying that we recognize their special problem regarding a public connection between their withdrawals and ours; and
- suggesting that they make a proposal on how to overcome this problem, so that we can negotiate an agreement *based on two concurrent schedules*.

This approach has several important advantages over the traditional one of simply insisting on mutual withdrawal:

—It should make it easier for them to agree to withdraw their troops, since they can save face by not having to agree to a *single* withdrawal schedule.

—While it helps them save face, it also gives them a tough problem. If they do not come back with a schedule, they cannot argue that we are blocking progress.

—If published, our approach will show that we made a serious and fair effort to achieve agreement.

—By asking them to come forward with a specific proposal, we avoid vague “understandings” about what they would do.

—It enables us to smoke them out: if their basic problem in accepting mutual withdrawals is merely one of “image,” we will have given them the best chance so far to work out a settlement; but if they want us to withdraw without pulling out their own forces at all, that position will be clear.

I would also seek during the meeting to draw from them their proposals on the other basic issue—political settlement—without appearing too anxious to get into this subject. (The record should show that they, not we, pressed this issue, for the sake of our relations with the GVN.) I would also probe them on Laos—again without appearing overly eager to go into the subject.

## 2. *Statement at the Meeting*

Attached at Tab A is the statement I propose to make.<sup>3</sup> It is in three parts—some questions, some remarks on the procedure we should follow, and a substantive section. At various points in the statement, I would try to draw out their immediate reaction.

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<sup>3</sup> Attached but not printed.

(a) *Questions*

I would begin with questions about two of their statements at the last meeting, one on how they viewed the course of these negotiations and the other on neither side's putting pressure on the other since "these are now negotiations." I would also ask about Foreign Minister Trinh's statements on their negotiating position in a recent interview.<sup>4</sup>

Asking these questions first would have a number of advantages. It would allow me to test the temperature at the beginning of the meeting, and it would provide a means for trying to get out of them whatever they were instructed to say. It would also show them from the outset that we expect them to clarify their position, and will not be put in a position in which they ask all the questions and we make all the explanations. It would also show for the record that we have not missed possible "signals."

(b) *Procedure*

I would then set out the procedure which must be followed at our meetings, emphasizing the necessity—and your specific instructions—that we move quickly to the basic issues. I would reiterate our general attitude and approach toward these negotiations.

(c) *Substance*

I would then state that they have often asked us (1) whether we accept the principle of total withdrawal and (2) when the withdrawal of all U.S. troops will be completed. I would say that we do accept the principle of total withdrawal, and then present in principle a schedule for the withdrawal of U.S. troops over 16 months (based on the proposal in your May 14 speech). The schedule would include the withdrawal of all U.S. troops in Vietnam, in accordance with our acceptance of the principle of total withdrawal.

After presenting this schedule, I would say that these withdrawals could not be unilateral, and that we recognize their special position of not wanting to equate their troops with our own. A way of handling the issue would be for them to tell us how they view the problem. We could then negotiate an agreement on this question on the basis of two

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<sup>4</sup> According to a March 10 memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh gave an interview to AP correspondent Dan DeLuce in which the Foreign Minister gave a "softer version" of conditions for a peace. In the oral version, Trinh did not say that the U.S. should recognize a provisional coalition government which would then organize elections. Rather he indicated that free and democratic elections would be organized and a broad conventional provisional government set up. The problem was that in his written response to the question submitted by the AP correspondent, Trinh took the "the usual Hanoi line" based on the ten points. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 144, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, March 1970)

concurrent schedules. I would next mention the importance of verification measures and the exchange of prisoners of war during the withdrawal process.

I would have papers with me on how we think they should perform in a reciprocal withdrawal, and on ways of handling the issue to publicly keep separate our withdrawals. I would tell them that, if they wished, we could make proposals on these questions. (And I would use the papers to check any proposals they make.) But I would make it clear that they should make proposals on their own performance.

My substantive statement would end with a statement that the technical issues involved in such a withdrawal could be negotiated between our delegations. I would conclude that we now have an opportunity to reach an agreement in principle which could bring an end to our sacrifices.

### *3. Tactics at Rest of Meeting*

During the rest of the meeting, I would question them about their position on mutual withdrawals and, obliquely, a political settlement. If asked, I would also comment in very general terms on the technical issues I listed. But I would not go into real detail on any subject, at this meeting or at the next, unless they make new proposals of their own.

*Recommendation:* That you approve the approach for the next meeting described in this memorandum, and the statement attached at Tab A.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Nixon initialed the approve option.

## 201. Memorandum of Conversation<sup>1</sup>

Paris, March 16, 1970, 9:40 a.m.

### PARTICIPANTS

Le Duc Tho, Adviser to the North Vietnamese Delegation  
Xuan Thuy, Chief of Delegation  
Mai van Bo, North Vietnamese Delegate General in Paris  
North Vietnamese Interpreter  
Two Other North Vietnamese Officials  
Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Major General Vernon Walters, Defense Attaché  
W. Richard Smyser, NSC Staff  
W.A.K. Lake, NSC Staff

Mr. Kissinger was greeted warmly. Although at the beginning of the meeting Xuan Thuy seemed less friendly than at the last, all of the North Vietnamese except Xuan Thuy were even more friendly than at the last meeting, and Xuan Thuy himself warmed up during the latter two thirds. They seemed to enjoy the less serious exchanges as much as ever.

Mr. Kissinger: My plane last night had mechanical difficulties, so we had to land in Germany and I did not get as much sleep as planned. So you have me at a great disadvantage today, since I am tired.

I would like to make a technical point today before we begin.

When I came here last time, we informed the French Foreign Ministry. This time, only the Presidency knows. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not.

We would appreciate it if you would keep this in mind if you talk to anyone in France about my visit.

We have also kept knowledge of these meetings to a very small circle, both in the U.S. and elsewhere. Specifically, we have not spoken to any of your allies. We think that this is your problem, if you want to tell them.

Xuan Thuy: This is up to you.

Mr. Kissinger: I wanted you to know that we have no intention of doing so. I say this only because we are asked sometimes.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Material, NSC Files, Box 852, For the President's File—Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. III. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. No drafting information appears on the source text, but Smyser and Lake sent it to Kissinger for transmittal to the President. The meeting took place at 11 Rue Darthe. Kissinger sent Nixon this memorandum explaining in an attached note that, "the important passages have been sidelined in red. I have not sidelined any of my opening statement." (Ibid.)

Xuan Thuy: We take note of that.

Mr. Kissinger: I had two questions which grew out of the last meeting and wondered if this is a good opportunity to ask them.

Xuan Thuy: Please explain what you have in mind.

Mr. Kissinger: Special Adviser Le Duc Tho said at the last meeting, when he spoke about the procedure of the negotiations, (I will have to read this in English as we translated it), “neither party will coerce the other party to a solution by applying pressure. Because we understand that these are now negotiations.” Could I ask Mr. Special Adviser Le Duc Tho what he had in mind?

Le Duc Tho: What is your second question, please?

Mr. Kissinger: I also have a subsidiary question to the first, but will have to hear your answer before asking it. I also have a second principal question.

Xuan Thuy: May I say a word here?

Mr. Kissinger: Please.

Xuan Thuy: Last time, we agreed between us that this time we enter into discussion of substantial questions. We said that we fully approve and support the 10 points of the Provisional Revolutionary Government. As to you, Mr. Special Adviser Kissinger, you said that you would speak about your views. Therefore, I think today we should not speak about procedural points. Today we should go directly into the matter. When we go into substantive questions and when we go into substantive views, we can put questions—not at the beginning of the meeting. This is more logical.

Mr. Kissinger: I wanted to put these questions because it is important for us to know clearly where we are going from here, and to understand each other before proceeding. It is particularly the phrase “without applying pressure” which interested me.

Le Duc Tho: May I speak now? I would propose this: Because your questions are related to one another, I propose you put forward all of them, so that my answers will be related to one another.

Mr. Kissinger: I would like now to ask my second question. We will then be finished with the last meeting, and we can go on. My second question is a procedural one. I want to understand how the Minister and the Special Adviser envisaged the course of the negotiations. It is not clear to me what Mr. Le Duc Tho meant when he spoke about the procedure of our negotiations. I want to understand whether he meant that we would first come to an agreement, then sign an agreement, then have separate discussions about implementation of an agreement, and then there would be a separate ratifying meeting, or if some of these would be concurrent. I want to know how you visualize all this.

You have been unusually clear. I have only two questions.

Xuan Thuy: The first question is not related to our discussions here so Le Duc Tho will answer it today whenever he likes.

The second question is related to our discussions here. We have repeatedly said that we fully approve and support the 10-point solution of the Provisional Revolutionary Government. In this, the last point concerns the signing of an agreement. As we have said at Avenue Kleber and at many other meetings, we are ready to sign an agreement with you.

Mr. Kissinger: You and we?

Xuan Thuy and Le Duc Tho: All four parties.

Xuan Thuy: In private meetings with Ambassador Lodge, I repeatedly told him that the United States should have direct private talks with the PRG. But since the U.S. is not ready to do so for the time being, the DRV will meet with the U.S. to discuss all questions and come to an understanding. These are private meetings but there should also be meetings among all four parties.

Mr. Kissinger: After we have come to an agreement?

Xuan Thuy: Yes.

Le Duc Tho: This is the experience we have had with other international negotiations. There are public meetings, but (also) private meetings to come to agreement before coming to the plenary. It is the same thing every time. After the private agreement, as Minister Xuan Thuy said, it will then be tabled at a public session with all parties, for public agreement.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Kissinger: I understand. It is clear. Now how about the first question? If you do not answer it, I shall be obliged to answer it myself, which would be embarrassing.

Le Duc Tho: Please express your view. There is nothing difficult here.

Mr. Kissinger: Our view is that while we talk, any effort by either side to bring military pressure in Vietnam or in one of the related countries would be inconsistent with our purposes here.

Le Duc Tho: Is that one of your questions, or your view?

Mr. Kissinger: I am trying to see if I understand Mr. Special Adviser correctly. What I have said is my interpretation of his remarks.

Le Duc Tho: This is your interpretation, which forces me to answer your question.

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<sup>2</sup> This paragraph was highlighted in red.



Mr. Kissinger: It is always a pleasure to hear from the Special Adviser. I hope I will not hear from him that military pressure is desirable.

Le Duc Tho: I would now like to speak about the negotiations here. We have our standpoint, our position. You have yours. The ten points and your position.<sup>3</sup> If negotiations are to take place, discussions should be about both sides' positions, to come to agreement and to settle the problem. This is the purpose. That is negotiation. We cannot force you to accept our position, and you cannot do the same to us. So here each side can negotiate, change views, and come to agreement. That is the problem, and it is clear.

Mr. Kissinger: It is partly clear. But I want to add that neither side will bring *additional* military pressure to bring the other to agreement.

Le Duc Tho: This is a misinterpretation of what I have said. What I was saying, was pressure *in negotiations*. As to *military* pressure, this is another question. In this regard, we think you are the side which is constantly making military pressure.

Mr. Kissinger: Well I have explained our position with regard to it, and I think that I now understand the Special Adviser.

Xuan Thuy: Now let us shift to other questions. Please explain your points.

Mr. Kissinger: Let me speak in two parts—the first procedural, the second substantive. Regarding the procedural points, I have two: I have noted that at each of our meetings, I have spoken first. The same happened at our other private meetings. But I don't think it is fair of us to take advantage of your good nature this way. I therefore suggest that at the next meeting we reverse the procedure and you speak first.

All right. Now, concerning the general procedure of these meetings.

We agreed in February that these would be serious negotiations. I told you then that we were entering these discussions with good will and earnest intent. We know that these negotiations will be difficult, but it will be no easier—and perhaps harder—to make peace at a later point. Therefore we are ready, as I told you, to be forthcoming and flexible in these negotiations. We respect your ability in negotiation as we respect your bravery in fighting. We believe, as I said last time, that our negotiations must come to a conclusion which is in the interest of both sides.

We are not here to repeat polemics or to repeat familiar positions. We are here to address the hard and specific questions, and to find agreement.

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<sup>3</sup> The rest of this paragraph and the next three paragraphs were highlighted in red.

In that spirit, President Nixon has asked me to emphasize especially his conviction that what we achieve here will depend entirely upon the directness of our approach. I can make that point to you no more directly than to read you one of his handwritten instructions to me as I was preparing for this meeting.

He said, "I want you to come directly to the hard decisions and I want you to say 'we will leave details to subordinates'—there should be a breakthrough on principle—and substance. You should tell them we are ready to go immediately to the heart of the problem."

There are two principal reasons for such a direct approach. First, these talks offer a new opportunity to discuss essentials. We are obviously concerned about the fundamental issues, considering the level of representation around this table. We can go rapidly and authoritatively to the heart of those issues, without the restraints of normal diplomatic channels.

The second reason is the one Minister Xuan Thuy mentioned at our last meeting, when he said we all have urgent duties elsewhere. Our participation in these talks is justified only if there is real progress. Repetition of standard positions, which leads to an impasse, should take place at a different level. As a student of these meetings, I am struck that both sides take extreme positions and later change them slowly. And, as a student of these meetings, I can even say that you have taken extreme positions from which you do not move at all. This particular forum is not suited to that process, and we do not intend to follow it.

We will give you our best judgment and not a bargaining position, and we will take into account your concerns. We assume you will do the same thing.

Should I stop at this point? Do you have any comment to make on what I have just said about the approach to these meetings? Or should I go on now to substance?

Xuan Thuy: (Xuan Thuy began to say something, but was cut off by Le Duc Tho before it was translated. Xuan Thuy then said:) Please speak on substance, then it will be our turn to speak.

Mr. Kissinger: I am told that in Vietnamese culture it is not proper to come too quickly to the point. I hope I have now proved my respect for your civilization, and will proceed to substance.

Xuan Thuy: It is out of our respect for American culture that we ask you to speak. Americans are known to be practical; they go right to the point.

Mr. Kissinger: Not professors, they are never practical.

Xuan Thuy: But you are a professor now doing practical work. There has been enough philosophy, so you should go to the point.

Mr. Kissinger: I know I will get a grade from Special Adviser Le Duc Tho.

Le Duc Tho: No, no.

Mr. Kissinger: At the last meeting we agreed that each side would present its position and we would then see where we stand. At today's meeting, I will state our position on the withdrawal of forces, and put forward a proposal. You then may wish to respond to this and perhaps make other proposals.

At the next meeting, if there is one, we each will have an opportunity to make further proposals and present further responses.

At our last meeting, Minister Xuan Thuy said he would like to know, "when the total withdrawal of U.S. troops—without leaving behind any troops or bases—will be completed." Your statement raised two questions which you have often asked: whether the U.S. withdrawal will be total, and what is the exact nature of the schedule of our withdrawal.

With regard to the first question, I want to repeat what I have said before: We are prepared to negotiate now the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops. This includes *all* U.S. troops, and the evacuation of *all* U.S. bases—without exception.

Le Duc Tho: And also allied troops?

Mr. Kissinger: Yes. You have often said that there will be progress if we accept the principle of total withdrawal. We accept this principle.

As for a schedule for the withdrawal of United States troops, I am today prepared to present such a schedule to you, for such a withdrawal extended over a sixteen-month period from the date of an agreement. This schedule is based on the level of American forces which will exist by April 15—that is to say 422,000 men. In addition there are other allied forces not included in this number, which will be withdrawn.

I will now give you the proposed schedule:

—In the first month, we would withdraw 5,000 U.S. troops. Other non-South Vietnamese allied forces would be withdrawn in this and subsequent months in about the same proportion as U.S. troops.

Le Duc Tho: Please repeat the first month. (He also asked other clarifying questions of Xuan Thuy and the interpreter.)

Mr. Kissinger: I have given you only the first month. Since there are 16 months to go through, I don't want total confusion. I want you to know the whole schedule. Each month, the same proportion of allied forces will withdraw as U.S. forces. For example, in the first month the same proportion will withdraw as 5,000 troops is to total U.S. forces. It would be the same with other months, so at the end, there would be no U.S. or allied forces.

I will now give the figures for each remaining month.

- In the second month, 10,000 U.S. troops.
- In the third month, 10,000 U.S. troops.

And in addition always allied forces, you understand, in the same proportion.

- In the fourth month, 27,000 U.S. troops.
- In the fifth month, 35,000 U.S. troops.
- In the sixth month, 35,000 U.S. troops.
- In the seventh month, 35,000 U.S. troops.
- In the eighth month, 35,000 U.S. troops.
- In the ninth month, 35,000 U.S. troops.
- In the tenth month, 10,000 U.S. troops.
- In the eleventh month, 15,000 U.S. troops.
- In the twelfth month, 10,000 U.S. troops.
- In the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth months, 40,000 U.S. troops in each month.

The reasons for these numbers depend on complicated technical studies, some of which I can discuss with you.

I know the temptation is to argue about this or that figure, or this or that time schedule. The important thing to remember is this: it is a plan for the total withdrawal of American forces. It is a plan that leaves no U.S. or non-South Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam. It is a plan that, once started, will proceed with ever greater acceleration, the consequences of which are obvious to you.

We reach here the heart of the problem. Both Minister Xuan Thuy and Mr. Le Duc Tho said at the last meeting that a settlement had to be on the basis of reality. I said at our last meeting that reality requires some reciprocity. It is for this that we are at these negotiations.

At the last meeting, I said that you have a special problem in placing your troops on the same legal basis as ours in a settlement, because you do not acknowledge their presence in South Vietnam and you cannot admit that they are “foreign.” I said that we would take full account of your special view of this question. We certainly have specific ideas on how this question can be resolved. But we think—in order to break the impasse—that the most productive way to handle the issue at this stage would be for you to tell us what your view is of how to handle this problem. We can then come to an agreement on the basis of two concurrent schedules which are not, however, directly linked.

In addition to this question, we believe that an essential part of an agreement would be measures which would allow each side to verify that the agreement is being maintained and completed.

Another essential principle is that all prisoners of war on both sides should be released at a very early point in the withdrawal process.

There are, of course, numerous technical questions involved in reaching an agreement on the basis of the principles I have stated. These

would include such questions as the methods of communication between the two sides, regroupment areas, and whatever military arrangements such as cease-fires are related to the withdrawal process.

Once we have agreed in principle these technical issues can and should be negotiated rapidly between the two delegations at the Hotel Majestic. We would appoint a new head of delegation to conduct such negotiations.

As I said at our last meeting and repeated at the outset of this session, we are under no illusion about the difficulty of resolving these issues.

But we believe the issues can be fairly resolved, and that both sides can keep faith with their sacrifices and their interests.

We hope that you agree that the specific proposals we have made today represent a major move and that, together with the frank discussions we had in February, this could amount to a turning point.

Minister Xuan Thuy and Special Adviser Le Duc Tho agreed at the last meeting that we were engaged in “serious negotiations.” I propose now that we should make the negotiations successful.

Xuan Thuy: You are finished?

Mr. Kissinger: Yes.

Xuan Thuy: I propose a little break.

Mr. Kissinger: OK. We have a plane wandering around Germany so General Walters must make a phone call to bring it back.

Xuan Thuy: Therefore a break is suitable.

(There was then a 15-minute break.)

Xuan Thuy: After listening to what Special Adviser Kissinger has said, I have two clarifying questions. Madame Nguyen thi Binh has stated that U.S. troops should be withdrawn within six months. We have supported this demand. And the U.S. side has said repeatedly, and publicly too, at Avenue Kleber that the U.S. is prepared to withdraw all its troops and bases within 12 months. And now Mr. Special Adviser says the U.S. would withdraw its troops and bases within 16 months after signing an agreement. So it is a longer period than, and not in accordance with, what the U.S. said previously.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Special Adviser spoke about technical complexities, but not complications, so we don't know why the period is prolonged. This makes us think about your intention of linking your withdrawals with the Vietnamization policy.

I am convinced that if you link withdrawals to Vietnamization, it would be difficult to settle the matter.

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<sup>4</sup> This and the next 11 paragraphs were highlighted in red.

The second question is that Mr. Special Adviser Kissinger has today spoken about other non-South Vietnamese troops and said we should express views on this, although you have said that you have specific views. I therefore ask Mr. Kissinger to express his special views on this subject.

I then have the following remarks. You have spoken today about military problems and said nothing about political problems. In our view, military problems should be linked to political problems. Therefore, I wonder when Mr. Kissinger will speak of political problems?

Mr. Kissinger: Let me take the second question first. At our last meeting I raised military problems and your side raised political problems. We therefore assumed responsibility for making a presentation to you on military problems today, and we assume you are free to make a presentation on any problem at this or the next meeting, including political problems, and we could then comment on it. But we recognize that political problems have to be discussed also.

On the first question: you asked about the relationship between our troop withdrawal schedule and Vietnamization—whether our schedule is based on Vietnamization.

In case you and we come to an agreement, the agreement will supersede the Vietnamization policy. Under the Vietnamization policy, our troop withdrawals depend on the three criteria established by President Nixon.

Under a negotiated agreement, our withdrawal continues under the schedule of the agreement as long as the agreement is being maintained, and regardless of what happens elsewhere.

As for the time period of withdrawal, of course Madame Binh did not consult us when she established a period of six months for the period of our withdrawal.

The period we have given here represents our best judgment of what is technically feasible under present circumstances. But it has certain elements of flexibility.

The major problem is to agree on the principles—including some of the principles of reciprocity. We could consider this one of the technical modalities.

Xuan Thuy: And what about modalities?

Mr. Kissinger: I have listed a series of issues. We think they can be discussed at Avenue Kleber in greater detail.

If you want to, I can give you some rough ideas we have on how other non-South Vietnamese forces should be withdrawn, but we would like to hear your ideas on this. We think it might be more natural.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This paragraph, the note in parenthesis, and the next paragraph were highlighted in red.

(Thuy and Tho talk among themselves.)

Xuan Thuy: Because this is a requirement of yours, you have been thinking about it. We haven't asked questions about it, so we haven't been thinking about it. What is your demand?

Le Duc Tho: You have demanded from us, so what is your demand? We demanded six months for your withdrawal. Now you have demanded something from us, this is Minister Xuan Thuy's question.

Mr. Kissinger: I find it difficult to believe that Xuan Thuy and Le Duc Tho have not yet thought about any question on Vietnam. But since you have appealed to my dominant characteristic—my vanity—I will give you some thoughts.

I want to repeat that if for historic, legal or moral reasons, you prefer to operate on the basis of two schedules, we are prepared to consider this. I am responding to Minister Xuan Thuy's request.

We regard the presence of non-South Vietnamese forces in sanctuaries in neighboring countries as having a direct impact on the war and as being part of the problem—particularly those in camps along and near the borders of South Vietnam.<sup>6</sup>

We believe that with the agreement, no new non-South Vietnamese personnel should be introduced, and the withdrawal then begins.

We believe that 25 percent of the non-South Vietnamese personnel should be withdrawn by the end of five months.

We believe that the return of *all* American prisoners of war should be completed at the end of five months.

After eight months, the withdrawal should be 50 percent completed.

After 12 months, it should be 75 percent completed. After 16 months, it should be totally complete, and all the bases in Cambodia and Laos along the frontier and the infiltration trails should be closed. (There was a long delay then while the North Vietnamese compared notes.)

Xuan Thuy: That is clear. Do you have more?

Mr. Kissinger: No.

Xuan Thuy: Now we will express our views.

Mr. Special Adviser Kissinger today has spoken first about procedural questions, and then about substantive questions which you called the "heart of the issue."

As to the question of speaking first, I think it is not an important question. In the previous meetings, since we met on your request, we invited you to speak first.

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<sup>6</sup> This and the next five paragraphs were highlighted in red.

You also recalled today the words “serious intent.” As we understand by the words “serious intent,” we understand negotiations so as to come to a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam problem on the basis of respect for the independence, sovereignty and self-determination of the Vietnamese people. And under this meaning of earnest intent, we are serious at the Kleber Street meetings.

At this meeting, our attitude is also serious. Naturally, we do want to make rapid settlement, and we will speak frankly as you say. We understand the problem is difficult and complicated. But we are prepared to find a just solution with you. Now I shall express our views on how to discuss the problems.

We have said we support the overall solution of the PRG. Now, I think it unnecessary to repeat the 10 points. We have spoken a great deal about them. I would like to propose that the negotiation should be held on two principal questions out of these 10 points. That is, military and political problems. We would like to discuss all of the problems. But the main problem is that military and political problems are linked together.<sup>7</sup>

The discussion cannot be held on military problems without discussing political problems, and discussions cannot be held of political problems without discussion of military problems. Therefore, we would like to discuss both political and military problems. And, if the discussion of these two military and political problems leads to agreement, then the solution of other problems should be easy.

Mr. Kissinger: What else is there besides military and political problems?

Xuan Thuy: I am coming to that.

I have been speaking of our point of view. Now I will present my views on the way to discuss the problem. Military and political problems must always be linked together. First, when talking of military problems, we may shift to political problems, and when talking of political problems, we may shift to military problems. Secondly, when discussing political and military problems, when either side thinks of a problem outside political and military problems, it may raise them.<sup>8</sup>

As to the schedule of withdrawal, you said Madame Binh did not consult you. But Madame Binh raised it a number of times at Kleber Street. It is not necessary to repeat here.

As for political problems, we have raised the question of replacing Thieu-Ky-Khiem, and forming a coalition government composed

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<sup>7</sup> This paragraph was highlighted in red.

<sup>8</sup> This paragraph was highlighted in red.



of three components. This is our policy, and this is our view on the way to discuss the problem.

I now leave word to Mr. Le Duc Tho.

Le Duc Tho: I now have something to add to what was said by Minister Xuan Thuy.

It is difficult indeed to reach a peaceful solution to the war which has been going on between us and you. But whether these differences will be resolved will depend on good will and serious intent as defined by Minister Xuan Thuy.

If you continue the policy of Vietnamization or you decide to negotiate from a position of strength, then it will be difficult to resolve the problem.<sup>9</sup>

But if now you want really to settle the problem peacefully and seriously, we are prepared to have such an attitude. But a rapid solution will depend on this good will and attitude.

To settle this matter, Minister Xuan Thuy has asked a question of whether you are prepared to discuss all the problems contained in the 10 points. Among these problems contained in the 10 points there are two main problems: political and military problems. Minister Xuan Thuy has proposed a manner of discussion. I would like to ask if you agree on this manner of discussion. Last time I spoke clearly of my views in this connection. But today we have not received a clear answer. Instead you raised only military problems. We recognize you have gone partially into the substance of military problems. But we think we should agree on a work program and second on the manner of discussion, and then begin our work. When discussion begins, we shall present our views on political and military questions, linked together.<sup>10</sup>

But in the course of discussion, if we meet an obstacle in discussing military problems, we will shift to political problems; and if we meet an obstacle in discussing political problems, we will shift to military problems. There must be agreement between us and you on this point.

And if now we and you come to agreement on principles, then details may be referred to Avenue Kleber. When the discussions at Kleber Street are completed, then we come to the signing of the agreement.

This is one question we would like to have clear views from you on. As to military problems, you have started into the substance today,

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<sup>9</sup> This sentence was highlighted in red.

<sup>10</sup> The last two sentences of this paragraph and the next six paragraphs were highlighted in red.

and we shall carefully study your position and I shall give you our answer at the next meeting, if any. But I would like to make some preliminary remarks. These are my remarks, not yet a counter proposal.

As far as your presentation is concerned with military problems, you have stated the U.S. would withdraw all U.S. and allied troops. It is a legal basis. As for what you have said on non-South Vietnamese troops, it is a different legal basis, it is a practical and technical question.

But when speaking about a schedule, your program shows two concurrent programs for the withdrawal of your and North Vietnamese troops, to be completed in the same period.

Therefore, your proposal amounts to mutual withdrawal. Your way of speaking is in very technical terms.

As for the period of withdrawal, we think there is some setback in your proposal. It is a longer period than that proposed by you at Kleber. It was 12 months for both sides to withdraw, and now it is 16 months for both sides to withdraw, a longer period.

Moreover, this schedule is withdrawal by dribblets. Previously, under Vietnamization you withdrew your troops, in what we called dribblets, on an average of over 10,000 men a month. Now, under this schedule, there are months in which you withdraw under 10,000, even 5,000 men. You said we should go into substance, not bargaining, then what is this schedule?

This is one of my preliminary remarks on your presentation. But we shall study your presentation, and give a response later. Now I would like to speak about what you said at the beginning of the meeting about military pressure.

In fact, we are an oppressed people. You came to our country to oppress us, and you have constantly maintained military pressure. And for the time being, the war continues to be intensified in South Vietnam in air activities, toxic chemical operations, and pacification operations.

And you have extended the war to Laos. Since Mr. Nixon came to power he has intensified the war in Laos. He occupied the Plain of Jars, and intensified the air war to unprecedented fierceness, so as to make pressure on the Northern part of our country, and to coordinate with the South Vietnamese battlefield.

With regard to Cambodia, you have been constantly maintaining military pressure on Cambodia so that country would give up its peaceful and neutral policies. It is the U.S., for the time being—no one else—who has created and maintained this tension in Phnom Penh.

We therefore wonder which side is using military pressure to put pressure on in negotiations.

It is our firm conviction that so long as you prolong and intensify the war, you will meet defeat. The experience we have had in Laos is clear.

In Laos, as in Vietnam after the peace, you intervened. You also launched the war on the Pathet Lao. But the Pathet Lao forces were not overwhelmed. Then in 1962 the Geneva Agreements were signed. The Geneva Agreements of 1962 were torn again and war resumed. But you cannot overwhelm the Pathet Lao. You occupied the Plain of Jars. Now you lost it again. Laos is evidence of your policy of using Asians to fight Asians. But your policy fails and you cannot win.

Therefore, your Vietnamization policy will fail. If you refuse to draw experience from this situation, then there would be a second Laos in Cambodia. Prince Sihanouk said himself that Cambodia will be turned into another Laos. If you failed in Laos and Vietnam, how can you succeed in Cambodia?<sup>11</sup>

We have repeatedly said that we respect the 1962 agreement on Laos and the 1954 agreement on Cambodia. But if you don't respect these Geneva Agreements of 1962 and 1954, and you intensify the war, then the Laotians, Cambodians and Vietnamese will unite to fight you. These three people were united in the fight against the French.

If you don't respect what you have signed, then certainly the three Indo-Chinese people will unite and defeat you. Therefore, the military pressure you speak about is not military pressure from our side. There is no other way for us but to continue to fight if your military pressure continues.

As for us, we don't want to make military pressure. We are an oppressed people, and we do not want to fight, but we must against aggression.

If you really want a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam problem with good will, then we are prepared for it as I said.

This is what I have to add today. We should agree on a program of work, and then begin discussions.

Mr. Kissinger: Let me make some observations. This is a quick reaction to what you have said. I have not had an opportunity to study my colleague's notes.

Very frankly, the problem exists between us that it is hard to tell when you are saying something for psychological effect and when you are saying what you believe. For example, last time and today you keep saying that our air operations have intensified. But they have actually been reduced 25 percent. I do not know what this may mean to you, but I know they have been reduced by 25 percent. It is a fact.

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<sup>11</sup> This and the next paragraph were highlighted in red.

Xuan Thuy: Theoretically speaking.

Mr. Kissinger: No. Practically speaking.

Le Duc Tho: Counting raids against North Vietnam, including B52's around the DMZ?

Mr. Kissinger: Counting everything. I am not saying that this is a consolation for those still receiving the bombs, but it is a fact.

Secondly, what you say concerning Laos is an interesting example of the problem we both face. You say you want to preserve the Accords of 1962 and that we are trying to upset them. We sincerely believe that we are trying to preserve them, and you are trying to upset them.

If I can make a personal observation, you are doing better in upsetting them while "seeking to preserve them," than we are doing in preserving them while "trying to upset them."

Le Duc Tho: What you have just said about Laos reminds me of what you say about South Vietnam. You are constantly saying that we scrapped the 1954 Agreements but the opposite happened. This was like Laos.

Mr. Kissinger: Rather than debate what happened in Laos and who is responsible for what in Laos, let me make the following statement.

If you are really interested in preserving the 1962 Accords and are not trying to advance further, we have no interest in increasing the bombing in North Laos. Under these conditions, any bombing by our side in Northern Laos would be sharply reduced to very minimal proportions.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, if offensive operations on your side continue, then the question you have put to me becomes very relevant to us—how can we have confidence in any future agreement between us if present agreements are being broken.

Le Duc Tho: It is the reverse of what you said. It is our side which must wonder whether you will respect and maintain agreements you sign, from the fact you violated the agreement in Laos.

Mr. Kissinger: I do not want to debate with Mr. Special Adviser. Rather than accuse each other of violating agreements, I think it is important to make a concrete step, and for both of us to stop what we are doing.

Le Duc Tho: This is our firm conviction: We have always been respecting the Geneva Agreements of 1962. And if now you propose that we no longer debate who is responsible for what, we can sign an agreement to stop the debate here now.

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<sup>12</sup> This and the next paragraph were highlighted in red.

Mr. Kissinger: I don't want to stop the debate. I want to stop what is going on. An interesting fact, as I said the last time, is that most of the Pathet Lao we meet speak Vietnamese very well.

Le Duc Tho: I think if you stop your aggression in Laos, the Pathet Lao will stop fighting.

Xuan Thuy: I would like to add one sentence to close this chapter. I agree we should not talk of the Laotian problem in our talks here.

As to the whole problem of Laos, since I was one of the negotiators on Laos, I am fully aware of the problem. If I now speak of Laos, I must speak of the beginnings—how the U.S. intervened, how the U.S. makes aggression, etc. It would be too long.

Mr. Kissinger: I do not wish to prolong the debate on Laos. We are prepared to maintain the Accords. We are prepared to discuss concrete steps to preserve the Accords. We have no intention of having Laos as a base in Southeast Asia or directed against North Vietnam. We cannot accept having the 1962 Agreement overthrown, which would have serious consequences on our discussions here. This is not a debating point, it is a fact. I want to state it as precisely as possible.<sup>13</sup>

One final point, we have no desire to take away territory from the forces which now occupy it on the Communist side.

Le Duc Tho: I firmly believe that if you stop your aggression and really respect the Geneva Agreement of 1962, then the matter can be easily solved.

Xuan Thuy: May I add one sentence, then shift to another? Not only do we respect the 1962 Agreement, we support the five points put forward by the Neo Lao Hak Xat.<sup>14</sup> Now we should continue: Have you any other problems to raise?

Mr. Kissinger: Yes. I would like to raise a few points about what Mr. Special Adviser has said. We have made no effort to get Cambodia to abandon its policy of neutrality. Until a few months ago we did not even have diplomatic relations. Even today, we do not have full diplomatic representation there. And *we* do not have forces on Cambodian soil.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, we have no problem respecting the neutrality of Cambodia. As you saw from what I said at Minister Xuan Thuy's request, that is all we want from Cambodia.

It is also incorrect to interpret what President Nixon says as meaning that we *want* Asians to fight Asians. I don't think it is useful to discuss the Nixon Doctrine at this point though I could do so at some point.

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<sup>13</sup> This and the next two paragraphs were highlighted in red.

<sup>14</sup> The NLHZ 5 points were broadcast by Hanoi on March 6; see Document 197.

<sup>15</sup> The paragraph until this point was highlighted in red.

Le Duc Tho: All right.

Mr. Kissinger: We are interested in peace in Southeast Asia and the independence and sovereignty of the countries concerned. And I am enough of an historian to believe that the day may come when Hanoi perhaps will believe that this is a policy which can benefit it.

But I don't think we should debate historic causes. Our participation is worthwhile only if we discuss solutions. These exchanges of who did what in 1962 are not appropriate at our level.

As for your comments on the specific proposal I made today, I would not expect experienced diplomats like Minister Xuan Thuy and experienced advisers like Special Adviser Le Duc Tho not to challenge whatever we said to see what I will say next.

Le Duc Tho: Because your proposal is still an argument of beginning, it has not gone into substance. You have put forward a high price.

Mr. Kissinger: On what you said about dribbles, when one withdraws close to 500,000 men over whatever period, it is not dribbles. Especially when it is a continuing process and the numbers increase each month.

Le Duc Tho: But the entry of your troops was very rapid.

Mr. Kissinger: It just seemed that way to you.

Le Duc Tho: It is a fact.

Mr. Kissinger: No, it took over two years.

Let me demonstrate my inexperience as a diplomat by making the following statement to Minister Xuan Thuy and Special Adviser Le Duc Tho: If we come to an understanding about the other issues in the negotiations, the question of timing will not be the one on which the negotiations will fail—although we will not reach the exuberant optimism of Madame Binh. Let me therefore say that in our future discussions, we should concentrate on solutions and not on placing blame.<sup>16</sup>

Now let me turn to the essential points Minister Xuan Thuy and Special Adviser Le Duc Tho made. As I understand the proposition, it is this: the 10 points advanced by your side and the various proposals advanced by ours resolve themselves essentially into two issues. There are military issues and there are political questions. You believe these two issues are closely related. We are willing to discuss these two points together.

As I understand it, there should be flexibility in switching from one set to another, so if progress is made in one area it can be used to reinforce progress in another. And if there is deadlock in one, we can try to reduce it by progress in another.

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<sup>16</sup> This and the next four paragraphs were highlighted in red.

Le Duc Tho: Right.

Mr. Kissinger: We are prepared to proceed on this basis. It must be clear that this particular forum can only be maintained if there is real progress and not just general discussions. I don't believe the President would agree to continuing these meetings if they are only for an exchange of views.

On this basis, perhaps the best procedure is to stop talking about good will, and to begin to practice it.

Xuan Thuy: To sum up, today we have agreed. We raised the 10 points, you the 8 points, and others. We shall concentrate the discussion on military and political questions. You have agreed that we will switch from one to the other. You have agreed on this manner of discussion.

As to your proposals on military problems, I agree with Mr. Le Duc Tho that we will study them and speak out our views later.

As to the military and political problems we have raised, we would like to hear from you next time.

Mr. Kissinger: We have spoken on military questions.

Xuan Thuy: Next time you will speak on political questions and we will speak on military questions.<sup>17</sup>

Mr. Kissinger: Mr. Minister I admire your skill but . . .

Le Duc Tho: We agreed in principle.

Mr. Kissinger: To maintain symmetry, and so that I do not develop a complete inferiority complex, I suggest that you speak on political questions, and we will be prepared to comment, and you give us your views, and you make your proposals, in a framework different from that we have already discussed.

Le Duc Tho: We would like to propose that you should speak on both problems, military and political, and then we will speak on both. It is not a question of inferiority complexes. It is negotiations. You expose your views on military and political questions and we will comment and make known our views.

And actually we have spoken on political questions, of coalition government with three elements. You only said that a solution must reflect the balance of political forces. We have spoken about the principles of how to solve the political problem.

Mr. Kissinger: I still believe that we cannot have negotiations if we are put in the position of students being examined by you on our understanding of your position on the 10 points.

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<sup>17</sup> This and the next four paragraphs were highlighted in red.

Le Duc Tho: This is not true. These are negotiations between us. We have expressed our views. We would like to hear your views on the whole position. Then we will speak.

Mr. Kissinger: But there is no law of nature which insists that it is always our side which should make propositions. What concerns me is that I am always in the position of being a student of Mr. Le Duc Tho.

Xuan Thuy: Just as Special Adviser Kissinger said, our negotiations are aimed at coming to a real settlement. It is an exchange of views. The more rapidly this is done the better. That is why we like to listen to you on both of these crucial questions, so that it is easier for us to express our views. As to our positions, on the main, the principal questions, we have stated our positions.

Mr. Kissinger: So have we. If both sides state their points of view, there is no point in these meetings. Let me make one thing clear. You must not think that I have come here only to accept your propositions. I have come here to find an honorable compromise. If you believe that I have come here to accept your proposals, then we should stop these negotiations now.<sup>18</sup>

Le Duc Tho: But I have told you that we are here in negotiations, to come to an agreement. Neither side forces the other to accept its position. Neither side puts pressure to force the other to accept its position. We expound our point of view.

Mr. Kissinger: We will then both come to the next meeting prepared to be specific, and prepared to state our positions, not simply to comment on the other's position.

Le Duc Tho: This is quite right and clear. Please comment on our position.

Mr. Kissinger: You must say something first.

Le Duc Tho: We will speak on our position.

Mr. Kissinger: I have some technical questions. When do you want to meet next?

Xuan Thuy: It is up to you to decide. We are busy from now to the end of March. It is up to you to decide after the beginning of April.

Mr. Kissinger: First, let me ask another question. Must it be in Paris?

Le Duc Tho: Where should we go?

Mr. Kissinger: I have no specific idea. The problem is that it is extremely difficult for me to move without being observed. For example, I have to be in Switzerland in mid-April for a conference. But I do not insist on this.

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<sup>18</sup> This and the next four paragraphs were highlighted in red.



Xuan Thuy: Because you can come only on a weekend, we should meet on April 4th. You have easy transport means.

Mr. Kissinger: I would be happy to send a plane to bring Mr. Le Duc Tho to the United States. We could have a meeting of special advisers and ignore the other ministers and advisers.

Xuan Thuy: It is hard for us to go to other countries. And the French Government sends someone to accompany us.

Mr. Kissinger: I invite you all to the United States.

Le Duc Tho: After a settlement of the problem.

Mr. Kissinger: I could probably come on the 5th of April, if that is convenient.

Xuan Thuy: We are willing to sacrifice our Sunday.

Mr. Kissinger: If Minister Xuan Thuy goes to church, I must revise all my opinions of him. 10:00 a.m.?

Xuan Thuy and Le Duc Tho: All right.

Mr. Kissinger: It may have to be on the sixth.

Le Duc Tho: 9:30 would be better.

Mr. Kissinger: All right.

(The meeting ended at approximately 1:20 p.m.)

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## 202. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, March 17, 1970.

### SUBJECT

MACV Cambodia Assessment

I attach at Tab A a well thought-out assessment of the Cambodia situation done by General Abrams' staff.<sup>2</sup> The assessment makes the following points:

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. II, September 1969–9 April 1970. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information.

<sup>2</sup> Tab A was telegram MAC 2439 from Abrams to Wheeler, February 24, attached but not printed. Haig summarized it for Kissinger in a February 24 memorandum. Kissinger instructed that it be made into a memorandum for the President. (Ibid.) Grant revised it as a memorandum to Nixon and noted that he had "added some comments to bring the assessment up to date (as of March 13)." (Ibid.)

Cambodia's economy is in trouble, principally because rice exports have dropped to zero as a result of Sihanouk's policy of nationalizing the commercial sector. One reason for his decision to reopen relations with us may have been his need for foreign investment and aid. (Incidentally, State took a negative position on aid for Cambodia, in response to your recent request for its views. My staff is working up a set of proposals as to limited things we could do, for your consideration in case you do not agree with State's conclusions.)<sup>3</sup>

For the first time in years, Sihanouk faces concerted resistance to his domestic policies. He permitted the formation of the Lon Nol/Sirik Matak government last August so as to permit others to attempt to straighten out the economic mess without involving his own prestige.

Cambodia's attitude toward operations of VC/NVA forces on Cambodian soil has been hardening for several reasons:

- The Communists do not seem to be winning.
- Under U.S./GVN pressure, the Communists are establishing more or less permanent enclaves of de facto control in Cambodia.
- The Communists are helping Cambodian insurgents, who are an increasing nuisance.
- Political pressures within Cambodia are building up to do something about the VC/NVA presence.
- As Vietnamization progresses, the Cambodians face the prospect of fighting on Cambodian soil between the two Vietnamese camps, without the American presence to insure that the Vietnamese will not stay permanently.

The first shift in RKG policy in arms supply to the VC/NVA came in May, 1969, following the failure of the Communist spring offensive and the evidence that you planned to stay in Vietnam as necessary. Some supply may have been resumed in the autumn and Sihanouk's statements suggest that during his trip to Hanoi for the Ho Chi-Minh funeral he negotiated a quid pro quo with Pham Van Dong, in which the latter made some promises of withdrawals. Sihanouk seems to be less than happy with Vietnamese performance on that deal. We do not know whether arms are coming through Cambodia at the present time, but the rate of flow is certainly less than in the past.

Aside from domestic reasons for absencing himself (having lost a test with Sirik Matak in parliament in late December), Sihanouk may have decided on his sudden trip to France to avoid a scheduled visit by Pham Van Dong until he could see how the situation was developing.

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<sup>3</sup> Nixon highlighted the last sentences in this paragraph and wrote "Let's aid *new* group." Lon Nol and Sirik Matak overthrew Sihanouk on the afternoon of March 18, Cambodian time, which is 12 hours ahead of Washington time, but the President did not necessarily read this on the day it was drafted.

The study was written before the recent demonstrations against the Communist embassies in Phnom Penh.<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that the demonstrations followed reports that Sirik Matak had ordered the VC/NVA to remove their troops from Cambodia, and that he concurrently ordered the Cambodian army to drive the Communists out (an impossible task, given Cambodian military resources).

Lon Nol and Sirik Matak were probably reflecting strong nationalistic feelings in Cambodia, but it is still moot whether they cleared their actions with Sihanouk. Given the sharp competition between Sirik Matak and Sihanouk, it is possible that Sirik wanted to present Sihanouk with a fait accompli, or to challenge him to a test on grounds where Sirik Matak's position would be popular. On the other hand, nobody has challenged Sihanouk so directly in years, and it is quite possible that this is an elaborate maneuver, to permit Sihanouk to call for Soviet and Chinese cooperation in urging the VC/NVA to leave, on the grounds that he will fall and be replaced by a "rightist" leader if the VC/NVA stay in Cambodia.

The recent behavior of Sihanouk and the RKG would fit either thesis—i.e., that this is a collusive gambit; or that Sihanouk in fact faces a challenge from Sirik Matak and Lon Nol.

—Sihanouk has publicly claimed that the attacks on Vietnamese installations were "organized by pro-American plotters" and has expressed fears about a "right wing coup."

—He has announced that he will return home via Moscow and Peking, and that he will seek support in those capitals to urge the Vietnamese "to stop interfering in Cambodian affairs and avoid giving the rightists a pretext for seizing power." (He is to arrive in Phnom Penh without formal welcoming ceremonies on Wednesday.)

—He is quoted as calling for a referendum to learn whether the people support him or his challengers.

—The Government in Phnom Penh has called publicly for the withdrawal of VC/NVA troops. It has justified the demonstrators' action, but has called for order.

—Lon Nol has published a message to Sihanouk, justifying the demonstrations, denying any intent to align with SEATO, and calling

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<sup>4</sup> A CIA intelligence report distributed on March 18, but based on information obtained from an Asian merchant with good contacts within the Cambodia military on March 11–12, stated that the demonstrations and attack on the Provisional Revolutionary Government's embassy in Phnom Penh were planned by Sirik Matak with the support of Lon Nol. They were to be a showdown with Sihanouk and a prelude to his overthrow. The source also indicated that operating from Paris Sihanouk planned to replace Sirik Matak and Lon Nol, but both officials were aware of Sihanouk's plan. (Central Intelligence Agency Field Report, TDCS-314/03036-70, March 18; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 105, Geopolitical File, Cambodia, Chronology, March 1970–June 1973)

for Sihanouk's support for a 10,000 man increase<sup>5</sup> in the army. (Sihanouk made negative noises but avoided a direct reply when asked by newsmen if he concurred in the increase.)

Whatever the truth as to domestic power relationships, Cambodian feelings are being stirred up about the Communist presence, and no Cambodian Government will be likely in the future to take so casual a view of it as has been the case in the past.

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<sup>5</sup> Nixon underlined this phrase and wrote: "Let's get a plan to aid the new group on this goal."

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### 203. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, March 19, 1970, 10:08–11:55 a.m.

#### SUBJECT

Laos and Cambodia

#### PARTICIPANTS

Henry A. Kissinger, Chairman

State

U. Alexis Johnson

Jonathan Moore

Marshall Green

Defense

G. Warren Nutter

Dennis Doolin

CIA

Thomas H. Karamessines

[name not declassified] (for briefing only)

[name not declassified] (for briefing only)

JCS

Vice Admiral Nels C. Johnson

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. Colonel Behr sent this record and the minutes of the next six WSAG meetings on Laos and Cambodia to Kissinger on March 31. A note on Behr's transmittal memorandum reads: "HAK has seen. 4/6" The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

NSC Staff  
John H. Holdridge  
Col. Robert M. Behr  
Keith Guthrie

### SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

In the context of the President's desire to have hard and soft options formulated, the WSAG discussed possible actions (including use of Thai troops and B-52 raids) which might be taken in Laos. It was agreed that an in-place cease-fire proposal might be included among the alternatives although it was recognized that a cease-fire could have serious disadvantages. Ambassador Godley is to be requested to submit to Washington his plans for evacuating the Thai Sierra Romeo unit from Long Tieng.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Kissinger will discuss with the President the type of response to be made to Ambassador Godley's message urging use of additional Thai troops at Long Tieng.<sup>3</sup> State will provide by the afternoon of March 19 scenarios for possible diplomatic actions in connection with developments in Laos and Cambodia.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. [name not declassified] briefed on Laos. Friendly troops in the Long Tieng area included the recently deployed Sierra Romeo IX Thai artillery battalion. Three special guerrilla units from southern Laos were being moved in as reinforcements. Continued control of the air strip was essential if an effective defense was to be maintained. The North Vietnamese were moving but did not yet have enough strength to make the friendly position in Long Tieng untenable. If the friendly forces could hold for a couple of days, Vang Pao might be able to regroup and make a good defense, particularly if the weather improved and some air support were possible. The North Vietnamese were unlikely to go beyond Long Tieng in the immediate future. They had no supply caches in the area and would need perhaps a month to consolidate their position and eliminate isolated outposts in the vicinity.

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<sup>2</sup> Not found.

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2, Document 207.

<sup>4</sup> Eliot submitted the possible scenarios for Cambodia and Laos to Kissinger on March 19. For Cambodia, State suggested continuing to support Cambodian neutrality and territorial integrity and "not trying to force Cambodia into our camp." If Cambodia asked for military assistance or U.S. troops, the United States should react cautiously and "avoid getting sucked into a major role." The United States should agree to take Cambodian requests for economic assistance under sympathetic consideration, should encourage regional support for Cambodia, reactivation of the ICC, possible French support, and an international conference on Cambodian neutrality. As for Laos, the possible scenario included rebutting the Soviet Union's rejection of Souvanna's call for consultations under Article IV of the Geneva Agreement of 1962, encouraging India to call for a cease-fire, reconvening the Geneva Conference, direct cease-fire negotiations between the RLG and Pathet Lao, and collective action by Asian nations. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 LAOS)

Dr. Kissinger asked what the practical impact of the fall of Long Tieng would be. If it were merely a question of Vang Pao's morale, nothing had changed in the situation in northern Laos. Pointing out that Vang Pao's morale was an important factor, Mr. Karamessines said that if the Meos retreated across the Mekong to Sayaboury province, Souvanna's government would lose its only effective fighting force, and Souvanna would be in a less advantageous position in dealing with Souphanouvong. Mr. [name not declassified] pointed out that the North Vietnamese would be in a position to threaten some of the provincial capitals, and this might lead to a Lao attempt to appease them through some gesture such as requesting the US to halt bombing. In response to Mr. Kissinger's question, Mr. [name not declassified] said that Souvanna might request a bombing halt in northern Laos but would probably not seek a halt in the Panhandle area for fear of alienating US support for his regime.

Admiral Johnson raised the question of Long Tieng's location with regard to the 1962 line. Mr. Johnson observed that if the North Vietnamese intended to advance beyond the 1962 line, the route would not be through Long Tieng but along Route 7/13 toward northwest Laos. Mr. Karamessines pointed out that the North Vietnamese needed to eliminate Long Tieng because it was a threat to their flank, and Mr. [name not declassified] noted that once Long Tieng were neutralized there would be nothing to stop the North Vietnamese from moving northwest or south.

Mr. Moore asked when the rains would begin and what was likely to happen then. Mr. [name not declassified] replied that there were about two months of rain left. Mr. Green noted that various factors—supply problems, unfamiliar terrain, bad weather, and US bombing—might lead the North Vietnamese to pull back later on.

Mr. Kissinger asked why Thai units were being moved to Long Thieng at the same time the CIA station was being evacuated. He wondered about the consequences if any of the Thai were captured. Mr. Karamessines said [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*], but that there certainly might be problems if some of them were captured. Evacuation could be difficult, since it depended on control of the airstrip and would require the use of "Sky Crane" type helicopters to move the artillery pieces. The Thai units would be useful in order to provide some show of resistance to the North Vietnamese.

Mr. [name not declassified] briefed on Cambodia and reported that the situation remained quiet with no evidence of dissidence among the regular army commanders. In answer to Mr. Kissinger's questions, he said that it seemed unlikely Sihanouk would be permitted to return.

Mr. Kissinger asked if a Communist insurgency similar to that in Laos might develop in Cambodia. Mr. Karamessines thought this possible but not probable because of the strength of nationalist sentiment

against the Communists. Admiral Johnson suggested the North Vietnamese would not want to get involved in a war on two fronts in the south. Mr. Karamessines observed that the North Vietnamese would have no reason to mount an insurgency since they could continue to use Cambodia territory. Even if the Cambodians stopped cooperating with the Communists, the latter would find it difficult to retaliate because the Cambodians might enlist South Vietnamese assistance in suppressing Communist insurgents.

Mr. Moore asked about the new government's announcement that it would continue Cambodia's policy of neutrality. Mr. [name not declassified] said this indicated the new regime does not want a confrontation with the Communists right away. Mr. Moore observed that the Cambodians might put some restrictions on the Vietcong but would probably not go all the way. Mr. Green pointed out that the coup reflected basic underlying discontent in Cambodia. Though this was partly due to nationalist sentiment and concern about the Communists, it was also related to economic problems and Sihanouk's interference in the government process.

With the conclusion of the briefings, Mr. Kissinger opened discussion of US options in Laos. He said that the President wished to look at both hard and soft options. One course of action would be acquiescence in the present situation. We would see if the Communist advance loses momentum and would make general diplomatic efforts to stabilize the situation. We would continue our present support for the RLG but would not seek to increase Thai involvement, employ B-52's, or raise the Laotian question in Paris.

Mr. Johnson and Mr. Karamessines asked how the United States position would be affected if the North Vietnamese broke across the 1962 line. Mr. Kissinger said that the issue was not the line. Even if the North Vietnamese stop, they have upset the balance established in the Geneva accords. Mr. Green replied that this might not be true in absolute terms. The Meo have demonstrated their capacity to survive in the past and might re-emerge as a fighting force. In response to Mr. Kissinger's question, Mr. Karamessines agreed that if the Meos retreated to Sayaboury, they would be out of the war.

Mr. Moore said that was not the only option. The Meos could be relocated at other sites. Mr. Kissinger asked where the Meos were going now. Mr. Johnson replied they were moving south and southwest and none had reached Sayaboury.

Mr. Johnson said that because Vang Pao has suffered reverses, we are faced with the issue of letting him fall back from Long Tieng and trying to salvage as much as possible or trying to take a stand there. What can be salvaged from retreat is difficult to ascertain because it depends largely on psychological factors.

Mr. Kissinger asked if we had much that we could put into a defense of Long Tieng. Mr. Johnson mentioned the Thai regimental combat team (RCT) advocated by Ambassador Godley.<sup>5</sup> However, he noted that Ambassador Unger was bearish on using the RCT in Laos,<sup>6</sup> and neither the Thai nor the Lao Government had approached us about this although we had a second-hand report that Souvanna was interested. Mr. Green pointed out that the RCT involved is the one designated in the Taksin Plan,<sup>7</sup> and its employment might raise the question of US action under the Plan. He noted that Ambassador Unger thought the RCT would not be suitable for anti-guerrilla operations.

Mr. Kissinger said the situation in Laos posed three problems. The first was the military balance and whether the United States had any interest in this aspect by itself. The second was the impact on Hanoi. The President's threat to take necessary steps has something to do with North Vietnamese restraint in South Vietnam. Letting the Communists kick over the Geneva accords in Laos could have an opposite effect. Thirdly, there is the impact on Thailand and Cambodia. Mr. Johnson commented that reaction depends on how much we build Long Tieng up as a prestige factor.

Mr. Kissinger asked Mr. Karamessines if the Meos would in fact disintegrate. Mr. Karamessines replied that Vang Pao will do his utmost to hold the fragments of his forces together and to keep fighting while falling back so long as he feels he has backing, not just from the United States but also from Souvanna. Mr. Kissinger asked about the prospects for support from Souvanna, and Mr. Karamessines pointed out that in the last few days Souvanna had been providing some. Anything that the United States could do would also help. In answer to Admiral Johnson's question, Mr. Karamessines said that assurance of support was more important to Vang Pao than holding Long Tieng.

Mr. Moore raised the question of what would happen after the North Vietnamese take Long Tieng and added, in answer to Mr. Kissinger's question, that the fall of Long Tieng seemed certain. Mr. Moore noted that the Lao Ambassador had said that the North Vietnamese objective in seizing Long Tieng was to retaliate for the occupation of the Plaine des Jarres last year and that having reached Long

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<sup>5</sup> See footnote 3 above.

<sup>6</sup> Unger discussed the problems and consequences of deployment of Thai forces into Laos in telegrams 3207 and 3219 from Bangkok, March 18. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 567, Country Files, Far East, Thailand, Thai Involvement in Laos)

<sup>7</sup> The Taksin Plan (formerly known as Project 22) was a contingency plan for U.S.-Thai military response to North Vietnam overrunning Laos. A summary and history are attached to a March 22 memorandum from Holdridge to Kissinger. (Ibid., NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-072, WSAG Meeting, 3/24/70, Laos and Cambodia)



Tieng, they would not continue military pressure but would limit themselves to political pressure. Mr. Johnson said that capture of Long Tieng would permit the North Vietnamese to consolidate their position on the Plaine des Jarres. Mr. Kissinger commented that we have always thought the North Vietnamese could take over northern Laos but have tried to maximize the psychological inhibitions against their doing so. Mr. Green added that while the North Vietnamese have the military capacity to go beyond Long Tieng, they will undermine their political position by doing so.

Mr. Kissinger asked if anyone favored using Thai troops. Admiral Johnson said the JCS thought this possibility should be explored. In addition to the 13th RCT the Thai unit now in South Vietnam might be considered. The Thai forces could be placed on the ridge around Vientiane.

Mr. Green noted that the North Vietnamese have already demonstrated their ability to retaliate against the Thais by attacks along the border and might take action if the Thais become deeply involved in Laos. Mr. Moore said the political price to the United States could be high, since Thanom would like to get the United States more committed. Mr. Green said the question had both short and long-range aspects; the former involved only the use of the 13th RCT and its effect on the present situation while the latter had to do with the general question of the desirability of greater Thai involvement in the defense of Laos.

Mr. Kissinger asked if the introduction of Thai troops at this time would restrain the North Vietnamese. Mr. Green replied that on the contrary the North Vietnamese would very much like to give the Thais a beating, and Mr. Karamessines agreed.

Admiral Johnson circulated a draft cable prepared by the JCS calling for the transfer of the 13th RCT and the Thai unit in South Vietnam to Laos.<sup>8</sup> Mr. Green objected that the Thai unit in South Vietnam was made up of volunteers who were entitled to discharge if withdrawn from Vietnam. Admiral Johnson replied that if the Thai Government made a top-level decision to use its troops in Laos, any deficiencies and restrictions on the Thai forces could be taken care of.

Mr. Kissinger asked if Thai troops would not provide an incentive to the North Vietnamese to keep advancing, particularly if a Thai withdrawal from South Vietnam were involved. Mr. Green added that it was highly important to maintain the multinational character provided by TCC units in South Vietnam. Admiral Johnson said that even if Thai units could not be withdrawn from South Vietnam, the JCS thought it would be useful to send the 13th RCT to Laos. Mr. Kissinger concluded

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<sup>8</sup> Not further identified.

by saying that any Thai pullout from South Vietnam would have to be discussed with the President.

Mr. Kissinger said that it appeared to be the consensus that no additional Thai troops should be sent to Long Tieng but that we should consider how we might make use of Thai troops if the North Vietnamese continued to advance toward Vientiane and the provincial capitals.

At this point a newly received cable from Ambassador Godley urging use of Thai troops at Long Tieng was distributed to the WSAG members.<sup>9</sup> Mr. Karamessines suggested that it was desirable to re-examine the WSAG's view on Thai troops in the light of this latest message.

Mr. Kissinger asked if the arguments in favor of regrouping Vang Pao's forces south of Long Tieng did not also apply to using Thai troops. Mr. Johnson agreed that they did.

Mr. Kissinger noted that Ambassador Godley believed the Thais would have a desirable psychological impact that would make up for the loss of Long Tieng. Mr. Green countered that as Ambassador Godley recognized in his message, this was looking at the situation purely as seen from Vientiane. Mr. Moore added that Ambassador Godley did not address the questions of the military effectiveness of using Thais and the consequences of a possible Thai defeat.

Mr. Kissinger asked why, if Vang Pao might be able to hold, the Thais might not also be able to make a stand. Mr. Green said that we did not want to tempt the North Vietnamese to advance further. The presence of Thais might draw the Communists on; if the Thais were defeated, the loss to the United States would be all the more serious.

Admiral Johnson asked how we could say no if the Thais wanted to send troops to Laos. Mr. Green replied that so far the Thais have not asked to get involved. Mr. Kissinger asked how we would go about getting the Thais involved, and Mr. Johnson responded that we would have to induce Souvanna to request Thai assistance.

Mr. Green commented that Souvanna was searching for a diplomatic solution to the present difficulties. Mr. Kissinger asked how it was possible to pursue a successful diplomatic course unless we had power to back up our proposals. Mr. Johnson said that we did have

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<sup>9</sup> In telegram 1950 from Vientiane, March 19, received in the White House Situation Room at 11:45 a.m., Godley stated that "fresh troops on the ground, if introduced quickly enough, might still salvage situation" and "even undermanned, underequipped Thai units, which by comparison to those available to RLG look great, can make significant psychological as well as military contribution to the defense of Long Tieng." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 567, Country Files, Far East, Thailand, Thai Involvement in Laos)

power—the possibility of making a strong defense at a fallback position, the use of the special guerrilla units from southern Laos, and our air capabilities once the weather improved. In answer to Mr. Kissinger's question, Admiral Johnson said the weather would not be better until May. Mr. Kissinger commented that by then the Communists might hold three-fourths of Laos.

Mr. Johnson mentioned that a possibility for action on the diplomatic front was offered by an Indian proposal to call for a cease-fire in northern Laos (specifically excluding the Panhandle) and observation by the ICC. He read portions of a draft note prepared by the Indians.<sup>10</sup> He suggested that we take no public position on the proposal but that we welcome and encourage the Indian initiative, which could do no harm. Mr. Kissinger agreed that the proposal seemed harmless, and Mr. Green suggested that the Indians might get the ICC to issue the cease-fire proposal. Mr. Green added that Souvanna gave indications of being well disposed to the proposal if the ICC operated in all parts of Laos. He cautioned that we would not want to state that we were in favor, since this might cause the other side to back off. He said that the proposal had the advantage, if successful, of toning down the war and bringing about a balance of Laos. It might also bring pressure to stop bombing. Mr. Green noted that an in-place cease-fire in Laos might appear to set a precedent for South Vietnam, and that the North Vietnamese might therefore be reluctant to accept it. Mr. Kissinger said the Indian cease-fire proposal should be included in WSAG planning as a possible alternative.

Mr. Green called attention to the scheduled meeting between Souvanna and an envoy from Souphanouvong. He thought that Souphanouvong's position would likely be that no negotiations could be held until the bombing is halted. Souphanouvong might also make an unacceptable proposal on a dividing line.

Mr. Johnson suggested that we encourage the Indian initiative, which seemed the only realistic alternative open. Mr. Kissinger pointed out that a cease-fire would mean that the enemy would halt in place and not have to retreat during the rainy season. In effect, this might hand Laos to the Communists next year. Mr. Green admitted there was a 50-50 chance of this. In answer to Mr. Karamessines' question, Mr. Green said he believed the North Vietnamese would accept ICC observation. Mr. Kissinger noted that Mr. Green had stated his opinion that the enemy would probably stop after taking Long Tieng. We knew that they were worried by pressure from Vang Pao and bombing during the rainy season. A cease-fire would remove this pressure. What

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<sup>10</sup> Not found.

would the enemy give up in return? If the North Vietnamese were not likely to advance further, perhaps we should acquiesce as quietly as possible in the fall of Long Tieng and not buy into a cease-fire. Mr. Johnson admitted there were dangers involved in a cease-fire but said that we should not oppose it. Mr. Green added that a cease-fire had advantages too, although we would not want to take the lead in proposing it.

Mr. Green suggested that we might also keep up our diplomatic activity. We should keep accenting consultations under Article 4 of the Geneva Agreement and should dispatch notes to the Geneva signatories. We should release the President's exchange of letters with Kosygin and Wilson, and, in general, keep the focus on international efforts to deal with the problem. Mr. Kissinger pointed out that the President wanted a more active diplomatic scenario.

Mr. Kissinger raised the subject of B-52 bombing and confirmed with Admiral Johnson that there were no targets available at present.<sup>11</sup> Mr. Karamessines said that if targets existed and the situation was deteriorating on other fronts, we should bomb. Mr. Nutter said that this was about the only action open to us in the way of a hard option.

Mr. Kissinger asked if Congressional opposition to bombing was really important. We were faced with a Communist offensive, and our tactical air could not operate. What objection could there be to B-52 raids? Mr. Green said we could not disregard Congressional opposition. The enemy knows that this is a soft spot and will put out propaganda blaming us for escalation. Mr. Kissinger asked if we could ever hope to appease Congressional opponents. The President's November 3 speech indicated a strong stand was more effective in dealing with them. Mr. Green said we should hold B-52's in reserve until we have a clearer idea of enemy intentions. If the North Vietnamese head for Vientiane, we could reconsider.

Mr. Kissinger said that the President wanted to have both hard and soft options. From a military standpoint it would be difficult to

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<sup>11</sup> On March 19 Haig sent Kissinger a memorandum enclosing a message from Abrams to Wheeler in which MACV stated: "The situation in northern Laos has, according to information available to us, not stabilized. There is no adequate intelligence on which to select B-52 targets. If targets could be developed there is no assurance that Ambassador Godley could clear them because of the lack of knowledge of friendly troop dispositions." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 102, Vietnam Country Files, B-52 Strikes in Northern Laos)

put together a hard option.<sup>12</sup> The use of Thai troops and B-52 raids might be considered.

Mr. Johnson raised the question of briefing Congress about the Sierra Romeo operation. Mr. Kissinger said this should not be done yet.

Mr. Kissinger asked about progress in moving special guerrilla units (SGU's) to Long Tieng from southern Laos. Mr. Karamessines said it would not be until "late tonight" that there could be enough SGU's in Long Tieng to offer a chance of making a defense. It was agreed that the WSAG would meet on the morning of March 20 to review the situation at Long Tieng.

Mr. Kissinger cautioned that we did not want a Thai debacle in Long Tieng. Mr. Moore said that Ambassador Godley assured us he had plans for removing the Sierra Romeo unit if necessary. Mr. Kissinger said Ambassador Godley should be directed to provide these plans to Washington.

Mr. Kissinger said that he would discuss the use of additional Thai forces with the President. Mr. Johnson suggested that a telegram on this question responding to Ambassador Godley's message be prepared for Kissinger's approval. Admiral Johnson said that the JCS had such a draft cable in preparation.

Mr. Green and Mr. Johnson said that diplomatic scenarios on Laos and Cambodia would be submitted the same afternoon (March 19).

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<sup>12</sup> After the WSAG meeting, at 12:30 p.m., Kissinger telephoned U. Alexis Johnson to inform him that the President called him to ask what the WSAG had "come up with." Kissinger replied, "there wasn't much we could do militarily." The President "went through the roof" and said he wanted a "hard option." Johnson told Kissinger, "We have got the hard option but everyone was against it." Kissinger asked Johnson to write up a "hard option" before 2:45 p.m., noting "can't have any discussion of whether desirable or not; just write it up." (Ibid., RG 59, U. Alexis Johnson Files: Lot 96 D 695, Telcons, March–April, 1970) Johnson immediately called Green and asked him to get something down for meeting at the White House at 1 p.m. (Ibid.) For the meeting at 1 p.m., see Document 204.