

**FOREIGN
RELATIONS
OF THE
UNITED
STATES**

1969–1976

VOLUME VII

**VIETNAM
JULY 1970–
JANUARY 1972**



**DEPARTMENT
OF
STATE**

Washington



**Foreign Relations of the
United States, 1969–1976**

Volume VII

**Vietnam
July 1970–
January 1972**

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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Preface

The *Foreign Relations of the United States* series presents the official documentary historical record of major foreign policy decisions and significant diplomatic activity of the United States Government. The Historian of the Department of State is charged with the responsibility for the preparation of the *Foreign Relations* series. The staff of the Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, under the direction of the General Editor of the *Foreign Relations* series, plans, researches, compiles, and edits the volumes in the series. Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg first promulgated official regulations codifying specific standards for the selection and editing of documents for the series on March 26, 1925. These regulations, with minor modifications, guided the series through 1991.

Public Law 102-138, the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, established a new statutory charter for the preparation of the series which was signed by President George H.W. Bush on October 28, 1991. Section 198 of P.L. 102-138 added a new Title IV to the Department of State's Basic Authorities Act of 1956 (22 U.S.C. 4351, et seq.).

The statute requires that the *Foreign Relations* series be a thorough, accurate, and reliable record of major United States foreign policy decisions and significant United States diplomatic activity. The volumes of the series should include all records needed to provide comprehensive documentation of major foreign policy decisions and actions of the United States Government. The statute also confirms the editing principles established by Secretary Kellogg: the *Foreign Relations* series is guided by the principles of historical objectivity and accuracy; records should not be altered or deletions made without indicating in the published text that a deletion has been made; the published record should omit no facts that were of major importance in reaching a decision; and nothing should be omitted for the purposes of concealing a defect in policy. The statute also requires that the *Foreign Relations* series be published not more than 30 years after the events recorded. The editors are convinced that this volume meets all regulatory, statutory, and scholarly standards of selection and editing.

Structure and Scope of the Foreign Relations Series

This volume is part of a subseries of volumes of the *Foreign Relations* series that documents the most important issues in the foreign policy of the administrations of Richard M. Nixon and Gerald R. Ford. This volume documents U.S. policy towards the war in Vietnam, Laos,

and Cambodia from July 1970 to January 1972. It is the second of five volumes covering the Vietnam war under Presidents Nixon and Ford, 1969–1975.

*Focus of Research and Principles of Selection for Foreign Relations,
1969–1976, Volume VII*

During the period covered by this volume, July 1970–January 1972, the Nixon administration expanded the Vietnam war into Cambodia and Laos as part of its strategy. This volume covers South Vietnam in the context of this larger war in Southeast Asia. The volume begins in July 1970 in the aftermath of the Cambodian incursion. At the time, a variety of topics dominated the policy discussions of President Nixon and his principal advisers—Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry Kissinger and his NSC Staff; Kissinger's Deputy, Brigadier General Alexander M. Haig; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer; Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker in Saigon; Commander of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, General Creighton Abrams; Ambassador G. McMurtie Godley in Vientiane; Ambassador Emory C. Swank in Phnom Penh; and chief Paris Peace Talks negotiator, David K.E. Bruce. Among these topics were U.S. troop withdrawals, Vietnamization, negotiations in Paris (both the public plenary sessions and the secret talks between Kissinger and North Vietnamese Politburo member, Le Duc Tho), and possible South Vietnamese operations in Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam.

Throughout the rest of 1970 these themes moved forward on separate paths that occasionally intersected with one another. South Vietnamese operations, first in Cambodia and then in Laos, were seen in policy terms as providing South Vietnam additional time to develop a more effective military, to generate economic growth, and to achieve some degree of political stability. The operations were also to demonstrate the success of Vietnamization and justify the continuing withdrawal of U.S. troops.

In late 1970 and early 1971, the focus shifted to decision making regarding plans to implement a major South Vietnamese out-of-country operation called Lam Son 719. The strategic purpose of the operation was to halt or slow the flow of military supplies to Communist forces in South Vietnam via the panhandle of Laos. At the same time, it would demonstrate the growing military prowess of the South Vietnamese Army.

On the negotiating front, Kissinger continued in 1970 and throughout 1971 to meet periodically in Paris with Le Duc Tho and other senior Vietnamese Communist functionaries, but made no progress. At the same time, representatives of both sides also met publicly in the

plenary meetings. Each side used the public Paris meetings to exchange carefully calibrated propaganda, making the meetings, if possible, less productive than the secret talks. The volume focuses on the Kissinger–Le Duc Tho talks with only occasional documentary coverage of the public talks.

This volume also documents President Nixon’s penchant for secret operations and covert warfare: his continued support for secret bombing campaigns in Cambodia and Laos, and his approval of the November 1971 Son Tay raid into North Vietnam to rescue American prisoners of war. Nixon also signed off on new and continuing information gathering initiatives and propaganda that supported intelligence operations against Communist forces, organizations, and governments in South Vietnam, North Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Additionally, he approved clandestine support for South Vietnamese political entities friendly to the United States. These operations are documented in some detail to demonstrate the role of covert actions in support of overt political and military operations.

In the waning months of the period covered by this volume, deadlock had set in. Neither side appeared able to win militarily, or even to weaken his adversary sufficiently to make him negotiate in good faith. There were signs, however, that Hanoi might be preparing to mount a major military effort in 1972. Its purpose would be to breakthrough this impasse without having to travel a diplomatic path. The volume concludes at this point.

Editorial Methodology

The documents are presented chronologically according to Washington time. Memoranda of conversation are placed according to the time and date of the conversation, rather than the date the memorandum was drafted.

Editorial treatment of the documents published in the *Foreign Relations* series follows Office style guidelines, supplemented by guidance from the General Editor. The documents are reproduced as exactly as possible, including marginalia or other notations, which are described in the footnotes. Texts are transcribed and printed according to accepted conventions for the publication of historical documents within the limitations of modern typography. A heading has been supplied by the editors for each document included in the volume. Spelling, capitalization, and punctuation are retained as found in the original text, except that obvious typographical errors are silently corrected. Other mistakes and omissions in the documents are corrected by bracketed insertions: a correction is set in italic type; an addition in roman type. Words or phrases underlined in the originals are printed in italics. Abbreviations and contractions are preserved as found in the

original text, and a list of abbreviations is included in the front matter of each volume.

Bracketed insertions are also used to indicate omitted text that deals with an unrelated subject (in roman type) or that remains classified after declassification review (in italic type). The amount and, where possible, the nature of the material not declassified has been noted by indicating the number of lines or pages of text that were omitted. Entire documents withheld for declassification purposes have been accounted for and are listed with headings, source notes, and number of pages not declassified in their chronological place. All brackets that appear in the original text are so identified in footnotes. All ellipses are in the original documents.

The first footnote to each document indicates the source of the document, original classification, distribution, and drafting information. This note also provides the background of important documents and policies and indicates whether the President or his major policy advisers read the document.

Editorial notes and additional annotation summarize pertinent material not printed in the volume, indicate the location of additional documentary sources, provide references to important related documents printed in other volumes, describe key events, and provide summaries of and citations to public statements that supplement and elucidate the printed documents. Information derived from memoirs and other first-hand accounts has been used when appropriate to supplement or explicate the official record.

The numbers in the index refer to document numbers rather than to page numbers.

Advisory Committee on Historical Diplomatic Documentation

The Advisory Committee on Historical Diplomatic Documentation, established under the *Foreign Relations* statute, reviews records, advises, and makes recommendations concerning the *Foreign Relations* series. The Historical Advisory Committee monitors the overall compilation and editorial process of the series and advises on all aspects of the preparation and declassification of the series. The Historical Advisory Committee does not necessarily review the contents of individual volumes in the series, but it makes recommendations on issues that come to its attention and reviews volumes as it deems necessary to fulfill its advisory and statutory obligations.

Presidential Recordings and Materials Preservation Act Review

Under the terms of the Presidential Recordings and Materials Preservation Act (PRMPA) of 1974 (44 U.S.C. 2111 note), the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) has custody of the Nixon Presi-

dential historical materials. The requirements of the PRMPA and implementing regulations govern access to the Nixon Presidential historical materials. The PRMPA and implementing public access regulations require NARA to review for additional restrictions in order to ensure the protection of the privacy rights of former Nixon White House officials, since these officials were not given the opportunity to separate their personal materials from public papers. Thus, the PRMPA and implementing public access regulations require NARA to formally notify the Nixon Estate and former Nixon White House staff members that the agency is scheduling for public release Nixon White House historical materials. The Nixon Estate and former White House staff members have 30 days to contest the release of Nixon historical materials in which they were a participant or are mentioned. Further, the PRMPA and implementing regulations require NARA to segregate and return to the creator of files private and personal materials. All *Foreign Relations* volumes that include materials from NARA's Nixon Presidential Materials Project are processed and released in accordance with the PRMPA.

Nixon White House Tapes

Access to the Nixon White House tape recordings is governed by the terms of the PRMPA and an access agreement with the Office of Presidential Libraries of the National Archives and Records Administration and the Nixon Estate. In February 1971, President Nixon initiated a voice activated taping system in the Oval Office of the White House and, subsequently, in the President's Office in the Executive Office Building, Camp David, the Cabinet Room, and White House and Camp David telephones. The audiotapes include conversations of President Nixon with his Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry Kissinger, other White House aides, Secretary of State Rogers, other Cabinet officers, members of Congress, and key foreign officials. The clarity of the voices on the tape recordings is often very poor, but the editor has made every effort to verify the accuracy of the transcripts produced here. Readers are advised that the tape recording is the official document; the transcript represents an interpretation of that document. Through the use of digital audio and other advances in technology, the Office of the Historian has been able to enhance the tape recordings and over time produce more accurate transcripts. The result is that some transcripts printed here may differ from transcripts of the same conversations printed in previous *Foreign Relations* volumes. The most accurate transcripts possible, however, cannot substitute for listening to the recordings. Readers are urged to consult the recordings themselves for a full appreciation of those aspects of the conversations that cannot be captured in a transcript, such as the speakers' inflections and emphases that may convey nuances of meaning, as well as the larger context of the discussion.

Declassification Review

The Office of Information Programs and Services, Bureau of Administration, conducted the declassification review for the Department of State of the documents published in this volume. The review was conducted in accordance with the standards set forth in Executive Order 12958, as amended, on Classified National Security Information and applicable laws.

The principle guiding declassification review is to release all information, subject only to the current requirements of national security as embodied in law and regulation. Declassification decisions entailed concurrence of the appropriate geographic and functional bureaus in the Department of State, other concerned agencies of the U.S. Government, and the appropriate foreign governments regarding specific documents of those governments. The declassification review of this volume, which began in 2006 and was completed in 2010, resulted in the decision to excise a paragraph or more in 1 document and make minor excisions of less than a paragraph in 11 documents.

The Office of the Historian is confident, on the basis of the research conducted in preparing this volume and as a result of the declassification review process described above, that the documentation and editorial notes presented here provide an accurate and comprehensive account of the Nixon administration's Vietnam War policy from July 1970 to January 1972.

Acknowledgments

The editors wish to acknowledge the assistance of officials at the Nixon Presidential Materials Project of the National Archives and Records Administration (Archives II), at College Park, Maryland. Additionally, the editors are grateful to the Richard Nixon Estate for allowing access to the Nixon presidential recordings and the Richard Nixon Library & Birthplace for facilitating that access. Furthermore, the editors are also grateful to Michael Johnson of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for making research in the diary of Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman, Joint Chiefs, 1970–1974, while it was still at the Pentagon, convenient and productive. The Diary has since moved to the National Archives. Special thanks are due to James Van Hook, formerly Joint State-CIA Historian, who was extremely helpful in arranging full access to the files of the Central Intelligence Agency. John Haynes of the Library of Congress was responsible for expediting access to the Kissinger Papers, including the transcripts of Henry Kissinger's telephone conversations. The editors were able to use the Kissinger Papers, including the transcripts of telephone conversations, with the kind permission of Henry Kissinger. The editors would like to also

thank Sandy Meagher for her valuable assistance in expediting the use of files of the Department of Defense.

David Goldman and Erin Mahan collected the documents for this volume. Goldman made most of the initial selections and annotations, while Mahan carried out additional research, and made final selections and annotations. Mahan did the initial review of the volume and Edward C. Keefer, former General Editor of the *Foreign Relations* series, did the final review. John M. Carland drafted the front matter and provided an additional reading of the volume. Chris Tudda and Susan C. Weetman, Chief of the Declassification and Publishing Division, coordinated the declassification review. Renée Goings did the copy and technical editing. Juniee Oneida prepared the index.

Bureau of Public Affairs
September 2010

Ambassador Edward Brynn
Acting Historian

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Sources

Sources for the Foreign Relations Series

The 1991 *Foreign Relations* statute requires that the published record in the *Foreign Relations* series include all records needed to provide comprehensive documentation on major U.S. foreign policy decisions and significant U.S. diplomatic activity. It further requires that government agencies, departments, and other entities of the U.S. Government engaged in foreign policy formulation, execution, or support cooperate with the Department of State by providing full and complete access to records pertinent to foreign policy decisions and actions and by providing copies of selected records. Most of the sources consulted in the preparation of this volume have been declassified and the collections are available for review at the National Archives and Records Administration.

The editors of the *Foreign Relations* series have complete access to all the retired records and papers of the Department of State: the central files of the Department; the special decentralized files ("lot files") of the Department at the bureau, office, and division levels; the files of the Department's Executive Secretariat, which contain the records of international conferences and high-level official visits, correspondence with foreign leaders by the President and Secretary of State, and memoranda of conversations between the President and Secretary of State and foreign officials; and the files of overseas diplomatic posts. All the Department's indexed central files through July 1973 have been permanently transferred to the National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, Maryland (Archives II). The Department's decentralized office (or lot) files covering the 1969–1976 period, which the National Archives deems worthy of permanent retention, have been transferred or are in the process of being transferred from the Department's custody to Archives II.

The editors of the *Foreign Relations* series also have full access to the papers of President Nixon and other White House foreign policy records. Presidential papers maintained and preserved at the Presidential libraries and the Nixon Presidential Materials Project include some of the most significant foreign affairs-related documentation from the Department of State and other Federal agencies including the National Security Council, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Department of Defense, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Dr. Henry Kissinger has approved access to his papers at the Library of Congress. The papers are a key source for the Nixon-Ford subseries of *Foreign Relations*.

Research for this volume was completed through special access to restricted documents at the Nixon Presidential Materials Project,

the Library of Congress, and other agencies. While all the material printed in this volume has been declassified, some of it is extracted from still classified documents. Nixon's papers were transferred to their permanent home at the Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, in Yorba Linda, California, after research for this volume was completed. The Nixon Library staff is processing and declassifying many of the documents used in this volume, but they may not be available in their entirety at the time of publication.

Sources for Foreign Relations, 1969–1976, Volume VII

In preparing this volume, the editors made extensive use of Presidential papers and other White House records at the Nixon Presidential Materials Project, which proved to be the single most useful collection bearing on the Nixon administration's management of the Vietnam War and its search for a negotiated peace in Southeast Asia. The collection of most value within the Nixon materials is the National Security Council (NSC) Files. Two files within the NSC Files provided the richest source of documentation: the Vietnam Subject Files and the Country Files for Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Also useful are the Country Files for Thailand, and the special File on Cambodian Operations. Additionally of importance in the NSC Files are the Paris/Talks Meeting Files, which relate to the formal Paris Peace Negotiations both public and private. The records of the Kissinger-Xuan Thuy and Le Duc Tho secret negotiations are in the NSC Files, For the President, China/Vietnam Negotiations, C.D. [Camp David]. A final file on negotiations of note are the private channel talks between Henry Kissinger and Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin, which are in the NSC Files, President's Trip File, Dobrynin/Kissinger. Their private discussions often related to Vietnam.

Of next importance are a group of files in the NSC Files. The first are the Backchannel Files. President Nixon and Kissinger communicated secretly with the Ambassador to Vietnam, Ellsworth Bunker, through backchannel messages that did not involve the rest of the bureaucracy. Also in the NSC Files are the Kissinger Office Files, the Subject Files, the Agency Files, the Haig Special and Chronological Files, Presidential/HAK Mem Cons, the President's Daily Briefing Files, and the Unfiled Materials.

Of similar importance to the files already mentioned are the National Security Council Institutional Files (H-Files), which are part of the NSC Files but are not to be confused with the NSC Institutional Matters File. The NSC Institutional Files (H-Files) contain the minutes of NSC Council Meetings, and such NSC subgroups as the Review Group/Senior Review Group and Washington Special Actions Group. For each set of meeting minutes there are corresponding folders that contain the papers that Kissinger, who chaired all of these groups, used

in preparation for the meetings. Also of value in the NSC Institutional Files (H-Files) are the National Security Study Memorandum and National Security Decision Memorandum files, containing the request for studies, the studies themselves, and the decision memoranda resulting from the process.

The White House taping system began operation in February 1971. From that time on, transcribed tapes of Nixon's office and telephone conversations with senior advisors are significant sources on the decision and policy making process. The most useful collections in the White House Special Files are the President's Personal Files, especially Memoranda for the President and the Haldeman Files. The Nixon Presidential Diary in the White House Central Files is an essential tool for researchers and is in the White House Central Files, Staff Member and Office Files.

After the records in the Nixon Presidential Materials Project, the Papers of Henry Kissinger at the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress are second in importance. While the Kissinger Papers often replicate documentation found in other collections, especially the NSC File of the Nixon Presidential Materials, they proved valuable and important documents unique to that collection, especially in the Geopolitical File, the file on Memoranda to the President, and the Presidential File. The Papers also contain the records of Kissinger's telephone conversations, copies of which have been given by Kissinger to the National Archives. These telephone transcripts are a key source that are open at the National Archives and are part of the Nixon Presidential Materials.

The Department of State, Department of Defense, and to a lesser extent the Central Intelligence Agency, strong bureaucratic players in past Vietnam volumes, played a much reduced role under President Nixon and Henry Kissinger, who concentrated policy in their own hands. The files of the Department of State, especially the Central Files are valuable for describing what was happening in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, or at the Paris talks. However, almost no Department of State files trace policy decisions, since the Secretary of State and his department were essentially excluded from the policy process on Vietnam. The Central Intelligence Agency records are valuable for intelligence on Vietnam and the war in Southeast Asia, and the most important intelligence records can be found in the Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files. Collections under CIA custody of note are the National Intelligence Council (NIC) Files, the Records of George Carver, and the DCI Helms and DCI Executive Registry Files. The National Intelligence Council's publication on intelligence in Vietnam, *Estimative Products on Vietnam, 1948-1975*, contains a good selection of intelligence estimates on Vietnam for this period. Intelligence Files for the Nixon administration, containing the records of the 40 Committee, cited as under the custody of the National Security Council but

destined for the Nixon Presidential Materials, were useful for covert operations and unconventional warfare.

The Department of Defense and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird were key players on policy towards Vietnam, but official Defense records did not prove particularly valuable. Laird's key memoranda are almost always found in the Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files. At the Ford Library, there is a collection of documents that cover Laird's tenure as Secretary of Defense. His staff chose these Laird Papers at the end of his term as Secretary of Defense with a view to documenting his major decisions. A substantial portion of this collection concerns Vietnam, Cambodia, and POWs/MIAs. The Laird Papers provided a useful mechanism to check against the documentation included in the volume. At the Department of Defense, the office papers of Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, 1970–1974, contain much that is useful on the JCS and policy implementation. More useful and more historically important is Moorer's Diary for those years and attached documents and transcripts of his telephone conversations. Both the office papers and the Diary are now at NARA.

The following list identifies the particular files and collections used in the preparation of this volume. The declassification and transfer to the National Archives of the Department of State records is in process, and most of these records are already available for public review at the National Archives.

In addition to the paper files cited below, a growing number of documents are available on the Internet. The Office of the Historian maintains a list of these Internet resources on its website and encourages readers to consult that site on a regular basis.

Unpublished Sources

Department of State

Central Files. *See* National Archives and Records Administration below.

INR/IL Historical Files

Historical intelligence files maintained by the Office of Intelligence Liaison in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research and still under Department of State custody.

National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland

Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State

Central Files

DEF 6 CAMB

DEF 6 THAI

DEF 7 US

DEF 19-8 US-CAMB
POL 27-7 ASIA SE
POL CAMB-US
POL 7 CAMB
POL 27 CAMB
POL 27 CAMB-KHMER
POL 15-1 LAOS
POL 27 LAOS
POL 27-14 LAOS
POL US-VIET S
POL 14 VIET S
POL 27 VIET S
POL 15-1 US/NIXON

Record Group 218, Records of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs

Records of Thomas H. Moorer

Diary, July 1970-January 1972

Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives and Record Administration, College Park, Maryland (Now at the Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, California)

National Security Council Files

Agency Files

Country Files, Far East:

Air Activity in Southeast Asia

Cambodia

Indochina

Laos

Vietnam

Files for the President, Vietnam Negotiations

Alexander M. Haig Chronological Files

Alexander M. Haig Special File

Henry A. Kissinger Office Files:

Country Files, Europe, USSR

Country Files, Far East, Vietnam: Reconnaissance Flights; Saigon Background

Documents; Troop Withdrawal

Paris Peace Talks

President's Trip Files

Presidential Correspondence

Presidential/HAK Memorandum of Conversations

Subject Files: Items to Discuss with the President; NSSMs and NSDMs

Vietnam Country Files

Vietnam Subject Files

National Security Council, Institutional Files (H-Files)

Policy Papers (1969-1974), National Security Decision Memoranda

Review Group/Senior Review Group Minutes

Review Group/Senior Review Group Meetings

Vietnam Special Study Group Meetings

Washington Special Actions Group Minutes

Washington Special Actions Group Meetings

White House Central Files

Staff Members and Office Files: President's Daily Diary

XVIII Sources

White House Special Files
President's Office Files
President's Personal Files

White House Tapes

Central Intelligence Agency

Files of the Deputy Director for Intelligence
Jobs 78-S02150R and 80-T01629R

Executive Files of the Director of Central Intelligence
Job 80-B01086A

Files of the Director of Central Intelligence's Special Assistant on Vietnam Affairs
Job 80-R01720R

National Intelligence Council (NIC) Files
Jobs 78-T02095R and 79-R01012A

Library of Congress, Washington, DC

Papers of Henry A. Kissinger
Chronological File
Geopolitical File
Memoranda of Conversations
Memoranda to the President
Miscellany, Records of Schedule
National Security Council, 1969-1976; Committees and Panels
Telephone Records: Telephone Conversations

National Security Council

Nixon Administration Intelligence Files

Washington National Records Center, Suitland, Maryland

FRC 330, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense

76-0067/76-0076

Secret and Top Secret subject decimal files of the Office of the Secretary of Defense,
Under Secretary of Defense, and their assistants, 1970

76-0197/76-0207

Secret and Top Secret subject decimal files of the Office of the Secretary of Defense,
Under Secretary of Defense, and their assistants, 1971

74-083

Secret subject decimal files of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for
International Affairs, 1971

74-0142

Minutes of Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird's morning staff meetings, 1969-1972

Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Melvin Laird Papers: Cambodia; POW-MIA; Vietnam

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Abbreviations and Terms

40 Committee, supervisory group established to approve, oversee, and control covert operations abroad; chaired by the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)

AAA, anti-aircraft artillery

ABC, American Broadcasting Company

AID, Agency for International Development

AIK, Assistance-in-kind

Amb, Ambassador

AP, Associated Press

ARC LIGHT, code name for U.S. B-52 bombing missions in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia

ARVN, Army of the Republic of (South) Vietnam

Avenue Kléber, shorthand for the public plenary talks held at the International Conference Center on Avenue Kléber in Paris

BDA, bomb damage assessment

BG, Brigadier General

BI, Battalion d'Infanterie or Infantry Battalion

Binh Tram, military way station on the Ho Chi Minh Trail

BP, Battalion Parachutiste or Paratroop Battalion

BT, see Binh Tram

BT, Battalion Territoriale or Territorial Battalion

BV, Battalion Volontaire or Volunteer Battalion

CAS, Controlled American Source

CBS, Columbia Broadcasting System

CHENLA II, a FANK operation with U.S. air support, begun August 20, 1971, to reopen Cambodian Route 6, a key link between Phnom Penh and Kompong Thom

Cherokee, a special communications channel established for highly sensitive State Department messages

ChiCom, Chinese Communist(s)

Chieu Hoi, South Vietnamese program to encourage defections by the Viet Cong to the Government of (South) Vietnam

Chup (also spelled Chhup) rubber plantation, base for Vietnamese Communist military units and a target for South Vietnamese operations in 1970-1971

CIA, Central Intelligence Agency

CINCPAC, Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command

CJCS, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

CNO, Chief of Naval Operations

COMMANDO HUNT, U.S. air interdiction campaigns in southern Laos, begun in November 1968, to interdict the flow of material on the Ho Chi Minh Trail from North to South Vietnam

COMINT, Communications Intelligence

COMUSMACV, Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam

CORDS, Civil Operations and Revolutionary (later Rural) Development Support

COSVN, Central Office of South Vietnam; Communist political and military headquarters for the southern half of South Vietnam

DCI, Director of Central Intelligence

DDI, Deputy Director of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency

XXII Abbreviations and Terms

DDO, Deputy Director for Operations, Joint Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff

DIA, Defense Intelligence Agency

DMZ, demilitarized zone, established roughly at Vietnam's 17th parallel to a width not more than five kilometers each side of the demilitarized zone line

DMZL, demilitarized zone line, also called demarcation line, which separated South Vietnam and North Vietnam, located in middle of demilitarized zone

DOD, Department of Defense

DOD/ISA, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

DRV, Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam)

EOB, Executive Office Building

Exdis, exclusive distribution

FANK, *Forces Armées Nationales Khmères* (Khmer Republic Armed Forces [Cambodia])

FAR, *Forces Armees Royales* (Royal Armed Forces [Laos])

Flash, precedence indicator for an extremely urgent message which requires instant action by the addressees regardless of the time of day or night

FSB, fire support base

GOC, Government of Cambodia

GVN, Government of (South) Vietnam

GKR, Government of Khmer Republic (Cambodia)

HAK, Henry A. Kissinger

HES, Hamlet Evaluation System, begun in 1967 to rate individual villages in South Vietnam according to 6-criteria of how secure they were

Highest Authority, President of the United States

Hmong, ethnic minority in Laotian hill country

Hue, major city in northern South Vietnam and capital of former Vietnamese empire

ICC, International Control Commission, established under the 1954 Geneva Accords and incorporated into the 1962 Geneva agreement on Laos

INR/IL, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Office of Information Liaison, Department of State

Ivory Coast, pre-operational phase of attempt to rescue U.S. prisoners of war at Son Tay facility in North Vietnam

ISB, International Supervisory Body

J-3, Operations Directorate of a Joint Staff

JCS, Joint Chiefs of Staff

JCSM, Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum

JGS, Joint General Staff, Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces

Khmer Krom, Indigenous ethnic Khmer minority living in South Vietnam

KIA, killed in action

King Pin (also called Kingpin), operational phase of attempt to rescue U.S. POWs from Son Tay facility in North Vietnam, November 1970

LAM SON (also LAMSON) 719, a February–March 1971 operation in Laos by South Vietnamese forces to interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail

LOC, line of communication

LPF, Lao Patriotic Front, political arm of the Pathet Lao

LTG, Lieutenant General

MAAG, Military Assistance Advisory Group

MACV, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam

- MACVSOG**, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Studies and Observation Group, organization that planned and carried out covert operations against North Vietnam; often called MACSOG
- MAP**, Military Assistance Program
- MASF**, Military assistance service-funded
- MATS**, Mobile Advisory Team
- MEDT**, Military Equipment Delivery Team
- Meo**, *see* Hmong
- MR**, Military Region; Government of Vietnam divided the country into four zones for military and administrative purposes; MR1 contained the five northernmost provinces of South Vietnam, MR2 included provinces in the central and north central sections, MR3 was made up of the south central part of the country and included Saigon, and MR4 in the Mekong Delta held the rest of the country; sometimes an MR was also called a Corps Tactical Zone
- MSQ Radar**, A ground-based radar system developed by the U.S. Air Force to guide aircraft to targets
- NATO**, North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- NIE**, National Intelligence Estimate
- NLF**, National Liberation Front
- Nodis**, No Distribution, Department of State telegram notation
- NSA**, National Security Agency
- NSC**, National Security Council
- NSDF**, National Social Democratic Front
- NSDM**, National Security Decision Memorandum
- NSSM**, National Security Study Memorandum
- NVA**, North Vietnamese Army, also PAVN
- NVN**, North Vietnam
- OMB**, Office of Management and Budget
- OSD**, Office of the Secretary of Defense
- Paris Peace Talks**, public talks between U.S. and GVN on one side and the DRV and PRG (NLF) on the other; also known as Plenary or Avenue Kléber talks
- PAVN**, People's Army of Vietnam, also NVA
- PDJ**, *Plaine Des Jarres* (Plain of Jars), strategically important area of Laos
- Phoenix**, The Phoenix Program was a joint U.S. and Vietnamese government intelligence program, which aimed at identifying and locating the Viet Cong infrastructure in the villages and capturing its membership, particularly the leadership, to gather intelligence information.
- PFIAB**, President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board
- POL**, Files of political orientation from the Department of State Central Files
- POL**, Petroleum Oil Lubricant
- POW**, prisoner of war
- PRC**, People's Republic of (Communist) China
- PRAIRIE FIRE**, a program of American led cross-border reconnaissance and exploitation patrols into eastern Laos
- PRG**, Provisional Revolutionary Government, political wing of the South Vietnamese Communist movement, replaced the NLF, but often terms were used interchangeably.
- PRU**, Provincial Reconnaissance Unit, a key tactical element in South Vietnamese attempt to neutralize and eliminate the Viet Cong infrastructure
- PS**, Pakse Site
- PSDF**, Peoples Self-Defense Forces (South Vietnam)
- PSYOPS**, Psychological Operations
- PTE**, Patrol Torpedo Fast (Boat)

XXIV Abbreviations and Terms

- RADM**, Rear Admiral
RCT, Regimental Combat Team
REFTEL, reference telegram
RF/PF, Regional Forces/Popular Forces, respectively South Vietnamese provincial and district security (militia) forces
RG, Record Group
RLA, Royal Lao Army
RLAF, Royal Lao Air Force
RLG, Royal Lao Government
RTG, Royal Thai Government
RVN, Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)
RVNAF, Republic of (South) Vietnam Armed Forces
- SAVA**, Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs, Central Intelligence Agency
SEA, Southeast Asia
SEATO, Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SECDEF, Secretary of Defense
SECSTATE, Secretary of State
SGU, Special Guerrilla Unit
SILVER BUCKLE, United States army operations to interdict, mine, and disrupt enemy lines of communication in an area of the Ho Chi Minh Trail south of Tchepone
SNIE, Special National Intelligence Estimate
SRG, Senior Review Group
STEEL TIGER, United States air operations over the northern portion of the Laotian panhandle designed to interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail
STOL, short takeoff and landing
SVN, South Vietnam
- TACAIR**, Tactical Air
TACAN, Tactical Air Navigation, a line-of-sight air navigation system that operates with a beacon.
Tag Board, unmanned “drone” aircraft used for high-speed, high-altitude reconnaissance
TCC, Troop Contributing Countries
TCN, Third Country National
TDY, Temporary Duty
- UPI**, United Press International
USA, United States Army
USAF, United States Air Force
USG, United States Government
USN, United States Navy
USIA, United States Information Agency
USIB, United States Intelligence Board
- VC**, Viet Cong
Viet Minh, *Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh* (League for the Independence of Vietnam), a Communist-led coalition, formed in 1941, that fought the Japanese in World War II and the French in the Indochina War
VOA, Voice of America
VSSG, Vietnam Special Studies Group
- WSAG**, Washington Special Actions Group
- Z, Zulu**, time designator on White House, Departments of State and Defense messages/cables based on Greenwich Mean, aka Coordinated Universal, Time

Persons

Abrams, Creighton W., General, USA, Commander, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam

Abshire, David M., Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations

Agnew, Spiro T., Vice President of the United States

Albert, Carl B., Democratic Congressman from Oklahoma, Speaker of the House

Alsop, Joseph, syndicated columnist

Anderson, George W., Admiral, USN (ret), Chairman, President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board

Anderson, Jack, syndicated columnist

Anderson, John B., Republican Congressman from Illinois

Arends, Leslie C., Republican Congressman from Illinois

Berger, Samuel D., Deputy Ambassador to Republic of Vietnam

Binh, Nguyen Thi, *see* Nguyen Thi Binh

Bo, Mai Van, *see* Mai Van Bo

Boggs, Thomas Hale, Democratic Congressman from Louisiana

Brezhnev, Leonid, General Secretary, Communist Party of the Soviet Union

Brown, John R., III, Staff Assistant to H.R. Haldeman

Bruce, David K.E., Ambassador to Paris Peace Talks from August 1970 until July 1971

Buchanan, Patrick, Special Assistant to the President, Speechwriter's Office

Bui Diem, Ambassador, Republic of Vietnam to the United States

Bunker, Ellsworth, U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam

Burrows, William C., Brigadier General (as of July 1971), USAF, Deputy Assistant for National Security Council Matters after July 1971, Chief, Far East/South Asia Division, Plans and Policy Directorate (J-5), Joint Chiefs of Staff

Butterfield, Alexander P., Deputy Assistant to the President

Carver, George A., Jr., Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs to the Director for Central Intelligence

Case, Clifford P., Democratic Senator from New Jersey; member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Chamberlain, Charles E., Republican Congressman from Michigan

Cheng Heng, Acting Head of State, Cambodia, March–October 1970, afterward Head of State

Chou En-lai (Zhou Enlai), Premier, People's Republic of China

Church, Frank F., Democratic Senator from Idaho

Clifford, Clark, Secretary of Defense, 1968–1969

Cline, Ray S., Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State

Coerr, Wymberly, Deputy Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State

Colby, William E., Deputy to COMUSMACV for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) until June 1971; thereafter Executive Director-Comptroller, Central Intelligence Agency

Connally, John B., Jr., Secretary of the Treasury from February 1971

Cook, Marlow W., Republican Senator from Kentucky

Cooper, Charles A., Minister-Counselor for Economic Affairs, U.S. Embassy, Republic of Vietnam

- Cooper, John Sherman**, Republican Senator from Kentucky, member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
- Cushman, John H.**, Major General, USA, Commander, Delta Regional Assistance Command (DRAC), and senior U.S. advisor in MR-4
- Cushman, Robert E., Jr.**, Lieutenant General, USMC, Deputy Director of Central Intelligence until December 1971
- Davies, Richard T.**, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs from August 1970
- Davis, Jeanne W.**, Director, NSC Staff Secretariat, from 1970 until 1971
- Dean, John W., III**, Counsel to the President
- Devlin, Lawrence**, CIA Chief of Station, Laos
- Dobrynin, Anatoly F.**, Soviet Ambassador to the United States
- Dole, Robert J.**, Republican Senator from Kansas
- Dong, Pham Van**, *see* Pham Van Dong
- Doolin, Dennis J.**, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asian and Pacific Affairs
- Dulles, John Foster**, Secretary of State from 1953 until 1959
- Duong Van Minh**, General, ARVN, known as "Big Minh"
- Ehrlichman, John D.**, Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs
- Eliot, Theodore L., Jr.**, Executive Secretary of the Department of State
- Ellender, Allen J.**, Democratic Senator from Louisiana
- Flanagan, William R.**, Rear Admiral, USN, Director of East Asia and Pacific Region, Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs
- Ford, Gerald R.**, Republican Congressman from Michigan; House Minority Leader
- Foster, John S.**, Director, Office of Defense Research and Engineering, Department of Defense
- Freidheim, Jerry W.**, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Operations), Department of Defense Spokesman
- Fulbright, J. William**, Democratic Senator from Arkansas; Chairman, Foreign Relations Committee
- Godley, G. McMurtrie**, U.S. Ambassador to Laos
- Goldwater, Barry M.**, Republican Senator from Arizona
- Gray, Gordon**, member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board
- Green, Marshall**, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs
- Griffin, Robert P.**, Republican Senator from Michigan
- Gromyko, Andrei A.**, Soviet Foreign Minister
- Habib, Philip C.**, member of the U.S. Delegation to Paris Peace Talks, and Deputy to Ambassadors Lodge and Bruce from May 1968 until October 1971
- Haig, Alexander M., Jr.**, Brigadier General, USA, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
- Haldeman, H.R.**, Assistant to the President and White House Chief of Staff
- Halperin, David R.**, member of the National Security Council staff
- Halperin, Morton**, member, National Security Council staff until September 1969; consultant to NSC until May 1970
- Hannah, John A.**, Administrator, Agency for International Development
- Hien, Phan**, *see* Phan Hien
- Helms, Richard M.**, Director of Central Intelligence
- Henkin, Daniel Z.**, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs

Ho Chi Minh, leader of the Vietnamese Workers Party (later the Vietnamese Communist Party); President of the DRV from September 2, 1945 until September 3, 1969

Holdridge, John H., member, National Security Council staff

Houdek, Robert, member, National Security Council staff

Huang Chen (Huang Zhen), PRC ambassador to France

Hubbard, Henry, White House correspondent, *Newsweek*

Hughes, James, Brigadier General, USAF, Military Assistant to the President

Huyen, Nguyen Van, *see* Nguyen Van Huyen

Irwin, John N., II, Under Secretary of State

Jackson, Henry M., Democratic Senator from Washington

Javits, Jacob K., Republican Senator from New York

Johnson, Lyndon B., President of the United States until January 20, 1969

Johnson, U. Alexis, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs

Jordan, Leonard B., Republican Senator from Idaho

Karamessines, Thomas H., Deputy Director for Plans, Central Intelligence Agency

Karhohs, Frederick E., Major General, USA, Director, Vietnam Task Force, International Security Affairs, Department of Defense

Kennedy, Richard T., Colonel, USA, member, National Security Council staff

Kheim, Tran Thien, *see* Tran Thien Khiem

Kissinger, Henry A., Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

Klein, Herbert G., White House Director of Communications

Knowles, Richard T., Lieutenant General, USA, Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Kosygin, Alexei N., Chairman, Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union

Ky, Nguyen Cao, *see* Nguyen Cao Ky

Ladd, Jonathan Fred, U.S. Political Military Counselor in Phnom Penh

Laird, Melvin R., Secretary of Defense

Lake, W. Anthony, Special Assistant to the Assistant for National Security Affairs until April 1970

Lam, Pham Dang, *see* Pham Dang Lam

Le Duan, First Secretary, Lao Dong Party and Senior Member of the Politburo of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam

Le Duc Tho, member of the Politburo of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and Special Advisor to, and de facto head of, the DRV Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks on Vietnam

Lodge, Henry Cabot, II, head of the U.S. Delegation to the Peace Talks in Paris on Vietnam until November 1969

Lon Nol, General, Prime Minister of Khmer Republic (Cambodia) and Minister of National Defense

Lord, Winston, member, National Security Council staff

Lynn, Laurence E., member, National Security Council staff

MacGregor, Clark, Assistant to the President for Congressional Relations from January 1971

Mai Van Bo, Democratic Republic of Vietnam's Delegate General in Paris until December 1970

Mansfield, Michael, Democratic Senator from Montana; Senate Majority Leader

Mao Tse-tung (Mao Zedong), Chairman of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party

- McCarthy, Eugene J.**, Democratic Senator from Minnesota
- McCain, John S.**, Admiral, USN, Commander in Chief, Pacific
- McCloskey, Robert J.**, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Press Relations, and Special Assistant to the Secretary
- McGovern, George S.**, Democratic Senator from South Dakota
- McManaway, Clayton E.**, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Office of Systems and Analysis
- Meyer, Cord**, Assistant Deputy Director for Plans, Central Intelligence Agency
- Minh, Duong Van**, *see* Duong Van Minh
- Mitchell, John N.**, Attorney General
- Mondale, Walter M.**, Democratic Senator from Minnesota
- Moorer, Thomas H.**, Admiral, USN, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
- Murphy, Daniel J.**, Rear Admiral, USN, Military Assistant to the Secretary of Defense
- Murphy, Frank**, member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board
- Murphy, Robert D.**, Ambassador, member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board
- Negroponte, John D.**, member, National Security Council staff
- Nelson, William E.**, Chief of Far East Division, Directorate of Plans, Central Intelligence Agency
- Nguyen Cao Ky**, Major General, VNAF, Vice President of the Republic of Vietnam until October 1971
- Nguyen Thi Binh**, (also known as Madame Binh), Foreign Minister, PRG, and the PRG's representative to the Avenue Kléber talks
- Nguyen Van Huyen**, Senator, Chairman of South Vietnamese Senate
- Nguyen Van Thieu**, President of the Republic of (South) Vietnam
- Nixon, Richard M.**, President of the United States
- Nutter, G. Warren**, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs
- Odeen, Philip A.**, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Systems Analysis, until November 1971, thereafter member, National Security Council staff
- Packard, David**, Deputy Secretary of Defense until December 1971
- Pao, Vang**, *see* Vang Pao
- Pastore, John O.**, Democratic Senator from Rhode Island
- Pearson, James B.**, Republican Senator from Kansas
- Percy, Charles H.**, Republican Senator from Illinois
- Perot, H. Ross**, Chairman of Electronic Data Systems, advocate for the release of U.S. POWs
- Pham Dang Lam**, Ambassador, Head of Republic of Vietnam Delegation to Paris Peace Talks
- Pham Van Dong**, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam
- Phan Hien**, member, North Vietnamese Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks
- Pickering, Thomas R.**, Deputy Director, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Department of State
- Podgorny, Nikolai V.**, President of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR
- Porter, William J.**, Ambassador to South Korea until August 1971; Chief, U.S. delegation to the Paris Peace Talks from September 1971
- Pratt, Mark**, Director of the Office of East Asian Affairs, Laos and Cambodia, Department of State
- Price, Raymond Jr.**, Special Assistant to the President, Speechwriters Office
- Pursley, Robert E.**, Brigadier General, USAF, Military Assistant to the Secretary of Defense

- Resor, Stanley R.**, Secretary of the Army until June 1971
- Rives, Lloyd M.**, Charge d'Affaires ad interim, Phnom Penh until September 1970; thereafter Deputy Chief of Mission
- Rogers, William P.**, Secretary of State
- Rusk, Dean**, Secretary of State until January 20, 1969
- Russell, Richard B.**, Democratic Senator from Georgia and Chair of the Appropriations Committee
- Scammon, Richard**, Director of the Elections Research Center and electoral analyst
- Schlesinger, James**, Assistant Director, Office of Management and Budget
- Scott, Hugh D.**, Republican Senator from Pennsylvania
- Seamans, Robert C., Jr.**, Secretary of the Air Force
- Selden, Armistead I., Jr.**, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs
- Sihanouk, Norodom**, Prince, deposed as Premier of Cambodia in March 1970, thereafter in exile
- Sisco, Joseph J.**, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs
- Sisouk na Champassak**, Minister of Defense, Royal Lao Government
- Sisowath Sirik Matak**, influential figure in Khmer Republic (Cambodian) politics, cousin of Sihanouk and ally of Lon Nol
- Smith, Foster**, Brigadier General, USAF, Chief, Far East Division, Plans and Policy Directorate (J-5), Joint Chiefs of Staff
- Smith, K. Wayne**, member, National Security Council staff
- Smyser, W. Richard**, member, National Security Council staff
- Souphanouvong**, Prince, Head of LPF and half brother of Souvanna Phouma
- Southerland, James W.**, Lieutenant General, USA, Commander, XXIV Corps, and senior American advisor, I Corps, from June 1970 until June 1971
- Souvanna Phouma**, Prince, Premier of Laos
- Spiers, Ronald I.**, Director, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Department of State
- St. John, Adrian**, Brigadier General, USA, Chief, Strategic Plans and Policy Division, Plans and Policy Directorate (J-5), Joint Chiefs of Staff
- Stennis, John C.**, Democratic Senator from Mississippi and Chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee
- Stevens, Theodore F.**, Republican Senator from Arkansas
- Sullivan, William H.**, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs and Chairman, Interdepartmental Group on Vietnam
- Swank, Emory C.**, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs until September 1970; thereafter, U.S. Ambassador to Khmer Republic (Cambodia)
- Symington, W. Stuart**, Democratic Senator from Missouri
- Talmadge, Herman E.**, Democratic Senator from Georgia
- Thanat Khoman**, Foreign Minister of Thailand until 1971
- Thant, U**, Secretary-General of the United Nations until December 1971
- Thieu, Nguyen Van**, *see* Nguyen Van Thieu
- Timmons, William E.**, Assistant to the President for Congressional Relations
- Tram Van Lam**, South Vietnamese Foreign Minister
- Tran Thien Khiem**, Prime Minister, Republic of Vietnam
- Valtin, Fred**, member, CIA staff
- Vang Pao**, General, Royal Lao Armed Forces, Commander of Military Region Two, Hmong head of the Meo (guerrilla forces)
- Vo Van Sung**, Democratic Republic of Vietnam's Delegate General in France after December 1971
- Vogt, John W.**, Lieutenant General, USAF, Director of the Joint Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff

- Walters, Vernon A.**, Lieutenant General, USA, Defense Attaché in the U.S. Embassy in Paris
- Watson, Arthur K.**, Ambassador to France from May 6, 1970
- West, Francis, J.**, Defense Department official and co-author of 1971 report for SRG on the military situation in Cambodia
- Westmoreland, William C.**, General, USA, Army Chief of Staff until June 1972
- Whitehouse, Charles**, specialist in East Asian affairs, Department of State; on occasion Acting Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs
- Wilson, James M., Jr.**, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs from August 1970
- Wolf, Joseph**, Special Assistant to the Director of the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Department of State
- Xuan Thuy**, Chief of the Delegation of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to the Paris Peace Talks, usually referred to as Minister
- Yeh Chien-ying (Ye Jianying)**, senior Chinese Communist Party (CCP) military cadre; Marshal, People's Liberation Army; Vice Chairman, Central Military Council of the Chinese Communist party; member of the Central Committee and Politburo
- Zais, Melvin**, Lieutenant General, USA, Director for Operations (J-3), Joint Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff
- Zhou Enlai**, *see* Chou En-lai
- Ziegler, Ronald L.**, White House Press Secretary
- Zion, Roger H.**, Republican Congressman from Indiana
- Zumwalt, Elmo R., Jr., "Bud,"** Admiral, USN, Chief of Naval Operations from July 1, 1970

Note on U.S. Covert Actions

In compliance with the *Foreign Relations of the United States* statute that requires inclusion in the *Foreign Relations* series of comprehensive documentation on major foreign policy decisions and actions, the editors have identified key documents regarding major covert actions and intelligence activities. The following note will provide readers with some organizational context on how covert actions and special intelligence operations in support of U.S. foreign policy were planned and approved within the U.S. Government. It describes, on the basis of declassified documents, the changing and developing procedures during the Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and Ford Presidencies.

Management of Covert Actions in the Truman Presidency

The Truman administration's concern over Soviet "psychological warfare" prompted the new National Security Council to authorize, in NSC 4-A of December 1947, the launching of peacetime covert action operations. NSC 4-A made the Director of Central Intelligence responsible for psychological warfare, establishing at the same time the principle that covert action was an exclusively Executive Branch function. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) certainly was a natural choice but it was assigned this function at least in part because the Agency controlled unvouchered funds, by which operations could be funded with minimal risk of exposure in Washington.¹

The CIA's early use of its new covert action mandate dissatisfied officials at the Departments of State and Defense. The Department of State, believing this role too important to be left to the CIA alone and concerned that the military might create a new rival covert action office in the Pentagon, pressed to reopen the issue of where responsibility for covert action activities should reside. Consequently, on June 18, 1948, a new NSC directive, NSC 10/2, superseded NSC 4-A.

NSC 10/2 directed the CIA to conduct "covert" rather than merely "psychological" operations, defining them as all activities "which are conducted or sponsored by this Government against hostile foreign states or groups or in support of friendly foreign states or groups but which are so planned and executed that any US Government responsibility for them is not evident to unauthorized persons and that if

¹ NSC 4-A, December 17, 1947, is printed in *Foreign Relations, 1945-1950*, Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment, Document 257.

uncovered the US Government can plausibly disclaim any responsibility for them.”

The type of clandestine activities enumerated under the new directive included: “propaganda; economic warfare; preventive direct action, including sabotage, demolition and evacuation measures; subversion against hostile states, including assistance to underground resistance movements, guerrillas and refugee liberations [*sic*] groups, and support of indigenous anti-Communist elements in threatened countries of the free world. Such operations should not include armed conflict by recognized military forces, espionage, counter-espionage, and cover and deception for military operations.”²

The Office of Policy Coordination (OPC), newly established in the CIA on September 1, 1948, in accordance with NSC 10/2, assumed responsibility for organizing and managing covert actions. The OPC, which was to take its guidance from the Department of State in peacetime and from the military in wartime, initially had direct access to the State Department and to the military without having to proceed through the CIA’s administrative hierarchy, provided the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) was informed of all important projects and decisions.³ In 1950 this arrangement was modified to ensure that policy guidance came to the OPC through the DCI.

During the Korean conflict the OPC grew quickly. Wartime commitments and other missions soon made covert action the most expensive and bureaucratically prominent of the CIA’s activities. Concerned about this situation, DCI Walter Bedell Smith in early 1951 asked the NSC for enhanced policy guidance and a ruling on the proper “scope and magnitude” of CIA operations. The White House responded with two initiatives. In April 1951 President Truman created the Psychological Strategy Board (PSB) under the NSC to coordinate government-wide psychological warfare strategy. NSC 10/5, issued in October 1951, reaffirmed the covert action mandate given in NSC 10/2 and expanded the CIA’s authority over guerrilla warfare.⁴ The PSB was soon abolished by the incoming Eisenhower administration, but the expansion of the CIA’s covert action writ in NSC 10/5 helped ensure that covert action would remain a major function of the Agency.

As the Truman administration ended, the CIA was near the peak of its independence and authority in the field of covert action. Although the CIA continued to seek and receive advice on specific projects from

² NSC 10/2, June 18, 1948, is printed *ibid.*, Document 292.

³ Memorandum of conversation by Frank G. Wisner, “Implementation of NSC-10/2,” August 12, 1948, is printed *ibid.*, Document 298.

⁴ NSC 10/5, “Scope and Pace of Covert Operations,” October 23, 1951, is printed in *Foreign Relations, 1950–1955*, The Intelligence Community, Document 90.

the NSC, the PSB, and the departmental representatives originally delegated to advise the OPC, no group or officer outside of the DCI and the President himself had authority to order, approve, manage, or curtail operations.

NSC 5412 Special Group; 5412/2 Special Group; 303 Committee

The Eisenhower administration began narrowing the CIA's latitude in 1954. In accordance with a series of National Security Council directives, the responsibility of the Director of Central Intelligence for the conduct of covert operations was further clarified. President Eisenhower approved NSC 5412 on March 15, 1954, reaffirming the Central Intelligence Agency's responsibility for conducting covert actions abroad. A definition of covert actions was set forth; the DCI was made responsible for coordinating with designated representatives of the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense to ensure that covert operations were planned and conducted in a manner consistent with U.S. foreign and military policies; and the Operations Coordinating Board was designated the normal channel for coordinating support for covert operations among State, Defense, and the CIA. Representatives of the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and the President were to be advised in advance of major covert action programs initiated by the CIA under this policy and were to give policy approval for such programs and secure coordination of support among the Departments of State and Defense and the CIA.⁵

A year later, on March 12, 1955, NSC 5412/1 was issued, identical to NSC 5412 except for designating the Planning Coordination Group as the body responsible for coordinating covert operations. NSC 5412/2 of December 28, 1955, assigned to representatives (of the rank of assistant secretary) of the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and the President responsibility for coordinating covert actions. By the end of the Eisenhower administration, this group, which became known as the "NSC 5412/2 Special Group" or simply "Special Group," emerged as the executive body to review and approve covert action programs initiated by the CIA.⁶ The membership of the Special Group varied depending upon the situation faced. Meetings were infrequent until 1959

⁵ William M. Leary, editor, *The Central Intelligence Agency: History and Documents* (The University of Alabama Press, 1984), p. 63; for text of NSC 5412, see *Foreign Relations, 1950-1955*, The Intelligence Community, Document 171.

⁶ Leary, *The Central Intelligence Agency: History and Documents*, pp. 63, 147-148; *Final Report of the Select Committee To Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities, United States Senate*, Book I, *Foreign and Military Intelligence* (1976), pp. 50-51. For texts of NSC 5412/1 and NSC 5412/2, see *Foreign Relations, 1950-1955*, The Intelligence Community, Documents 212 and 250.

when weekly meetings began to be held. Neither the CIA nor the Special Group adopted fixed criteria for bringing projects before the group; initiative remained with the CIA, as members representing other agencies frequently were unable to judge the feasibility of particular projects.⁷

After the Bay of Pigs failure in April 1961, General Maxwell Taylor reviewed U.S. paramilitary capabilities at President Kennedy's request and submitted a report in June that recommended strengthening high-level direction of covert operations. As a result of the Taylor Report, the Special Group, chaired by the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs McGeorge Bundy, and including Deputy Under Secretary of State U. Alexis Johnson, Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric, Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Lyman Lemnitzer, assumed greater responsibility for planning and reviewing covert operations. Until 1963 the DCI determined whether a CIA-originated project was submitted to the Special Group. In 1963 the Special Group developed general but informal criteria, including risk, possibility of success, potential for exposure, political sensitivity, and cost (a threshold of \$25,000 was adopted by the CIA), for determining whether covert action projects were submitted to the Special Group.⁸

From November 1961 to October 1962 a Special Group (Augmented), whose membership was the same as the Special Group plus Attorney General Robert Kennedy and General Taylor (as Chairman), exercised responsibility for Operation Mongoose, a major covert action program aimed at overthrowing the Castro regime in Cuba. When President Kennedy authorized the program in November, he designated Brigadier General Edward G. Lansdale, Assistant for Special Operations to the Secretary of Defense, to act as chief of operations, and Lansdale coordinated the Mongoose activities among the CIA and the Departments of State and Defense. The CIA units in Washington and Miami had primary responsibility for implementing Mongoose operations, which included military, sabotage, and political propaganda programs.⁹

President Kennedy also established a Special Group (Counter-Insurgency) on January 18, 1962, when he signed NSAM No. 124. The Special Group (CI), set up to coordinate counter-insurgency activities separate from the mechanism for implementing NSC 5412/2, was to confine itself to establishing broad policies aimed at preventing and re-

⁷ Leary, *The Central Intelligence Agency: History and Documents*, p. 63.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁹ See *Foreign Relations, 1961–1963*, volume X, Cuba, 1961–1962, Documents 270 and 278.

sisting subversive insurgency and other forms of indirect aggression in friendly countries. In early 1966, in NSAM No. 341, President Johnson assigned responsibility for the direction and coordination of counter-insurgency activities overseas to the Secretary of State, who established a Senior Interdepartmental Group to assist in discharging these responsibilities.¹⁰

NSAM No. 303, June 2, 1964, from Bundy to the Secretaries of State and Defense and the DCI, changed the name of "Special Group 5412" to "303 Committee" but did not alter its composition, functions, or responsibility. Bundy was the chairman of the 303 Committee.¹¹

The Special Group and the 303 Committee approved 163 covert actions during the Kennedy administration and 142 during the Johnson administration through February 1967. The 1976 Final Report of the Church Committee, however, estimated that of the several thousand projects undertaken by the CIA since 1961, only 14 percent were considered on a case-by-case basis by the 303 Committee and its predecessors (and successors). Those not reviewed by the 303 Committee were low-risk and low-cost operations. The Final Report also cited a February 1967 CIA memorandum that included a description of the mode of policy arbitration of decisions on covert actions within the 303 Committee system. The CIA presentations were questioned, amended, and even on occasion denied, despite protests from the DCI. Department of State objections modified or nullified proposed operations, and the 303 Committee sometimes decided that some agency other than the CIA should undertake an operation or that CIA actions requested by Ambassadors on the scene should be rejected.¹²

The effectiveness of covert action has always been difficult for any administration to gauge, given concerns about security and the difficulty of judging the impact of U.S. initiatives on events. In October 1969 the new Nixon administration required annual 303 Committee reviews for all covert actions that the Committee had approved and automatic termination of any operation not reviewed after 12 months. On February 17, 1970, President Nixon signed National Security Decision Memorandum 40,¹³ which superseded NSC 5412/2 and

¹⁰ For text of NSAM No. 124, see *ibid.*, volume VIII, National Security Policy, Document 68. NSAM No. 341, March 2, 1966, is printed *ibid.*, 1964–1968, volume XXXIII, Organization and Management of U.S. Foreign Policy; United Nations, Document 56.

¹¹ For text of NSAM No. 303, see *ibid.*, Document 204.

¹² *Final Report of the Select Committee To Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities, United States Senate, Book I, Foreign and Military Intelligence*, pp. 56–57.

¹³ For text of NSDM 40, see *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume II, Organization and Management of U.S. Foreign Policy, 1969–1972, Document 203.

changed the name of the covert action approval group to the 40 Committee, in part because the 303 Committee had been named in the media. The Attorney General was also added to the membership of the Committee. NSDM 40 reaffirmed the DCI's responsibility for the coordination, control, and conduct of covert operations and directed him to obtain policy approval from the 40 Committee for all major and "politically sensitive" covert operations. He was also made responsible for ensuring an annual review by the 40 Committee of all approved covert operations.

The 40 Committee met regularly early in the Nixon administration, but over time the number of formal meetings declined and business came to be conducted via couriers and telephone votes. The Committee actually met only for major new proposals. As required, the DCI submitted annual status reports to the 40 Committee for each approved operation. According to the 1976 Church Committee Final Report, the 40 Committee considered only about 25 percent of the CIA's individual covert action projects, concentrating on major projects that provided broad policy guidelines for all covert actions. Congress received briefings on only a few proposed projects. Not all major operations, moreover, were brought before the 40 Committee: President Nixon in 1970 instructed the DCI to promote a coup d'etat against Chilean President Salvador Allende without Committee coordination or approval.¹⁴

Presidential Findings Since 1974 and the Operations Advisory Group

The Hughes-Ryan amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1974 brought about a major change in the way the U.S. Government approved covert actions, requiring explicit approval by the President for each action and expanding Congressional oversight and control of the CIA. The CIA was authorized to spend appropriated funds on covert actions only after the President had signed a "finding" and informed Congress that the proposed operation was important to national security.¹⁵

Executive Order 11905, issued by President Ford on February 18, 1976, in the wake of major Congressional investigations of CIA activities by the Church and Pike Committees, replaced the 40 Committee with the Operations Advisory Group, composed of the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the DCI, who retained responsibility for the planning and implementation of covert

¹⁴ *Final Report of the Select Committee To Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities*, United States Senate, Book I, Foreign and Military Intelligence, pp. 54-55, 57.

¹⁵ Public Law 93-559.

operations. The OAG was required to hold formal meetings to develop recommendations for the President regarding a covert action and to conduct periodic reviews of previously-approved operations. EO 11905 also banned all U.S. Government employees from involvement in political assassinations, a prohibition that was retained in succeeding executive orders, and prohibited involvement in domestic intelligence activities.¹⁶

¹⁶ Executive Order 11905, "United States Foreign Intelligence Activities," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, Vol. 12, No. 8, February 23, 1976.

Vietnam, July 1970– January 1972

The Aftermath of the Cambodian Incursion, July 21–October 7, 1970

1. Editorial Note

Following the Cambodian incursion and the withdrawal of U.S. ground forces from Cambodia in June 1970, President Richard Nixon committed the United States to a policy of shoring up the regime of Cambodian Prime Minister Lon Nol with funds and equipment. In response to a July 21 memorandum from his Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry Kissinger, apprising him of actions underway in Cambodia, the President wrote in the margin of a paragraph detailing arms and equipment shipments, “step this up. This has been very slow for last 2 weeks.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 581, Cambodia, Actions on Cambodia, Vol. VI)

On July 23, Nixon issued Presidential Determination 71–2, which reallocated approximately \$40 million of Military Assistance Program (MAP) funds for Fiscal Year 1971 from other countries to Cambodia. In a July 21 memorandum to the President, Secretary of State William Rogers projected that the funds should provide the Cambodian army with enough light arms, ammunition, replacement supplies, and communications equipment to carry it through the early winter or rainy season. (Ibid., Box 370, Subject Files, Presidential Determinations thru 71–10, Feb. 1969–Mar 1971 [2 of 3])

In an undated memorandum to the President, Kissinger summarized reports of special tactical air strikes conducted in Cambodia July 19–27. At the bottom of the memorandum, Nixon wrote, “I think some of the strategic strikes are blown up on results—get more tactical strikes going which may have an effect on the current situation.” (Ibid., Box 581, Cambodia Operations, 1970, Actions on Cambodia, Vol. VI, Air Support in Cambodia)

On July 28, in a meeting of Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird and his key advisers, G. Warren Nutter, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, commented that the Commander in Chief in the Pacific, Admiral John McCain, Sr., believed that the \$40 million specified in Presidential Determination 71–2 would cover ex-

penses only for the first half of the year. Secretary Laird indicated that he had hoped to submit a supplemental request to Congress but that “the White House had decided to delay it until after the election.” (Memorandum for the record by Philip Odeen, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis), July 28; Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–76–67, Box 88, Viet 092, Jan–Aug 1970)

2. Memorandum for the President’s File by the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, July 22, 1970.

RE

Breakfast Meeting with Ambassadors Bruce and Bunker and Dr. Kissinger
(6:32–9:45 a.m.)

The President met with Ambassadors Bruce and Bunker for breakfast in the first floor family dining room prior to their departure from Washington. They had both attended the NSC meeting on the previous day² and Ambassador Bruce was leaving for Paris via Saigon to assume the position of Head of the US delegation to the Paris Talks. The purpose of this private meeting was to reiterate the President’s personal views and to help insure that both Ambassadors would remain responsive to the President’s direction and control during the upcoming Southeast Asian negotiations and the subsequent peace initiative. Prior to the beginning of substantive discussions Ollie Atkins took photographs of the group.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 189, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, July 1, 1970–September 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. Holdridge, Haig, and Kissinger drafted the memorandum on August 19. Kissinger did not initial the memorandum and there is no indication that Nixon saw it. A typed note at the end of the memorandum reads, “This account was derived primarily from the talking paper prepared for the breakfast and is not a verbatim account of the actual discussion.” An undated memorandum from Kissinger to the President, briefing him for the meeting, is *ibid.*, White House Special Files, President’s Office Files, Box 81, Memoranda for the President, Beginning July 19, 1970.

² See *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume V, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Document 348.

With respect to the handling of the peace initiative the President indicated that he wanted Ambassador Bruce to use the month of August to assess the other side's attitude and cautioned him to avoid any indication of over eagerness or vacillation on our part. The President emphasized the importance of maintaining secrecy and reminded Ambassador Bruce that he should maintain a low profile with the press until the initiative was launched. He also cautioned Ambassador Bruce to avoid contacts with Soviet representatives in Paris and to insure that his delegation abided by those guidelines.

The President also stressed the need for methodical preparation and careful review of the NSC ceasefire paper.³ In addition, the President told the Ambassadors that he considered them to be his personal representatives and that they should feel free to comment on problems directly to the President through Mr. Kissinger when necessary.

In commenting on US posture during this period the President reiterated to both Ambassadors that he intended to pursue a confident and firm posture with the other side and that strong retaliatory action would be taken against North Vietnam if the enemy undertook a significant provocation.

The President concluded the breakfast on a personal note by thanking the Ambassadors for their continuing contributions and by indicating his recognition that this was done at the greatest personal sacrifice. He commented on the key roles the Ambassadors were playing in the ultimate solution of the most vexing and grave problem facing this nation.⁴

³ See *ibid.*, Document 345.

⁴ In a letter to Kissinger, July 29, following his visit to South Vietnam July 25–27, Bruce wrote, "If the South Vietnamese can preserve and increase their present measure of governmental stability, their military competence, if correctly appraised by our own military (this is a large and vital if), should enable us to leave that country in a state of security possibly sooner than we have, up to the present, anticipated." He also warned, "Something needs doing in the economic sphere," recommending "drastic changes in their foreign exchange procedures." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 189, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, July 1, 1970–September 1970)

3. **National Security Study Memorandum 96¹**

Washington, July 23, 1970.

TO

The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
The Director, Control Intelligence Agency

SUBJECT

U. S. Policy Toward a Peace Initiative in Laos

The President has requested a study on an urgent basis of the courses of action open to the U.S. in the event of a peace initiative related to Laos which might be proposed by the Laotian Government, the Pathet Lao, or North Vietnam.

The study should consider likely forms of settlement which such an initiative might propose and their effects on U.S. interests. The study also should consider the relationship of such proposals to the U.S. position vis-à-vis Cambodia and South Vietnam. The anticipated roles of other states such as the Soviet Union, Communist China, North Vietnam, the U.K., and the ICC members² should be considered where appropriate. The full range of options open to the U.S. in respect to each possible peace proposal pertaining to Laos should be examined and the pros and cons of each fully discussed.

The study should be conducted by an ad hoc group comprising representatives of the addressees and the staff of the National Security Council, and chaired by the representative of the Secretary of State. The President has asked that this study be completed not later than August 7, 1970.

Henry A. Kissinger

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-51, SRG Meeting, Laos (NSSM 96), January 15, 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive. A copy was sent to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

² The International Control Commission (ICC), established under the Geneva Accords of 1954, was comprised of India, Canada, and Poland.

4. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, July 23, 1970.

PARTICIPANTS

Ambassador G. McMurtrie Godley, U.S. Ambassador to Laos
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger
Mr. John H. Holdridge

SUBJECT

Ambassador Godley's Comments on Developments in Laos

Dr. Kissinger began by informing Ambassador Godley that the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board had reported that Ambassador Godley was doing a great job in Laos. Dr. Kissinger added that Ambassador Godley had more guts than most people in his Service, which was much appreciated here.

Ambassador Godley thanked Dr. Kissinger for these remarks, and went on to raise a specific question: the U.S. personnel limitations in Laos. The ceiling established by the President was 1040 Americans, and Ambassador Godley wanted to know whether if he were to come in with a request for any more, there would be any heartburn in the White House. Dr. Kissinger asked how many additional people might be involved, and Ambassador Godley said that at the most there would be 80 more. Some were already there on TDY, and would be shifted over to permanent change of station. He didn't want to be pinned down on a fixed number. Dr. Kissinger declared that the President as a matter of principle wanted to make a maximum effort in Laos, and regardless of what messages might be sent to Ambassador Godley (including back channel), this would remain the President's wish. The President wanted maximum pressure to be maintained during the summer, and if Ambassador Godley came in with a request for more personnel as being necessary for this purpose, his, Dr. Kissinger's, instinct was that the President would agree. 80 could be accepted, but if the number could be squeezed to 40 we would be happier since there was in effect a commitment not to increase the numbers. However, if Ambassador Godley told us that he had to have the extra personnel, this would be acceptable.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 547, Country Files, Far East, Laos, 1 April 1970–11 August 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. The meeting was held in Kissinger's office. Holdridge forwarded the memorandum to Kissinger under an August 5 covering memorandum and Kissinger approved it on August 10.

Ambassador Godley said that if more Cambodian SGUs were desired, it could be arranged. He had checked with his Station Chief, and with Bill Nelson. Souvanna didn't mind; in fact, he would be delighted. Souvanna regarded the Cambodians as "brown folk," similar to the Lao, while the South Vietnamese were "yellow folk." Souvanna would be willing to live with the existing Prairie Fire operations, but there would be trouble if these operations were extended westward. It would be better to work out of the Bolovens with Cambodian and Lao SGUs. Ambassador Godley felt that these operations would be effective, but he was not so sure about the effectiveness of South Vietnamese operating in South Laos.

Dr. Kissinger questioned Ambassador Godley about the possibility of a Communist peace offensive in Laos. There apparently had been some feelers from the Russians, but if a peace offensive was in fact, underway, the President's present disposition was not to accept it unless it included Vietnam. Ambassador Godley thought that it would be difficult for the Lao to refuse to respond to a peace offensive. The Lao Armed Forces were extremely tired, and had lost lots of men. Souvanna, however, would be cautious.

Dr. Kissinger brought up Ambassador Godley's testimony before the Symington Subcommittee, wondering in particular how Senator Fulbright had treated him. Ambassador Godley expressed the opinion that the hearing had gone quite well. The one thing he had been worried about from Fulbright was questions on the presence of the Thai troops in Laos, which might have been leaked even though there was no transcript.² However, this issue had not caused any problems. The Senator had taken the line that there was nothing particularly secret about this matter, he had seen Mr. Helms' transcript about the Thai troops,³ and he was fully aware that the Thai ground forces were operating in Laos. Another Senator (Ambassador Godley didn't remember which) had wanted to know if the Thai had been asked to send troops by the Lao, to which Ambassador Godley had replied affirma-

² Kissinger sent a memorandum to Nixon, August 4, describing Godley's July 21 testimony before the Subcommittee on U.S. Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad. Kissinger noted, "at the opening of the hearing, after raucous protest from Fulbright and Symington, the Committee decided to have no transcript (the best possible outcome for us)." (Ibid.)

³ Apparent reference to Helms' testimony at a closed hearing before the Subcommittee on U.S. Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the U.S. Senate in October and November 1969. (*Congressional Quarterly*, Vol. XXV, 1969, p. 863) No record of the testimony was found, but Senator Fulbright stated publicly that the United States was sponsoring clandestine operations in Laos after a closed hearing with Helms on October 28. (*The New York Times*, October 29, 1970, pp. 1-2)

tively. Yet another Senator had asked how much the Thai troops cost, to which he had said that he didn't know, but believed that the cost in Laos was less than for the Black Panthers in South Vietnam. Ambassador Godley noted that he had made a memorandum covering the hearing for the record.

Dr. Kissinger asked if Long Tieng could be held during the dry season, to which Ambassador Godley replied that it could be held certainly until after the U.S. elections. When Dr. Kissinger asked if it could be held afterwards, Ambassador Godley stated that if the Lao could push out in a crescent West, Southwest, and South of Long Tieng it would be possible to hold the town. In response to a further question from Dr. Kissinger on the fighting capacity of the Meos, Ambassador Godley described them as being virtually out of the war. Many of the Meos had gone off to take care of their families, although little by little they were coming back. The Lao forces at Long Tieng now consisted of a national guerrilla force, i.e., were made up of units drawn from all over Laos. Vang Pao was still the best Lao general, but he was not as good now as he had been last year. He was tired, and his charisma was down. He had a habit, too, of not using his staff, and was a one-man artilleryman, even though he was an effective political leader. Nevertheless, he was still the best the Lao had, and there was no one else on the scene. In further describing the makeup of the Lao forces, Ambassador Godley observed that what had been Meo battalions a year ago were now all 40 percent Lao, that is, of non-Meo personnel.

Dr. Kissinger asked about the fighting capacity of the North Vietnamese—were they still good? Ambassador Godley replied that they were very good. Vang Pao had a practice of cutting open the stomachs of NVA casualties to see if they had been eating well, and had found them still to be well fed. There were no 16–18 year olds among the NVA troops. Originally, the 316th Division had not fought well, for example, the soldiers had jumped out of their foxholes to fire at attacking aircraft, but they had learned.

Dr. Kissinger asked if the B-52s had helped. Ambassador Godley shouldn't hesitate to ask for B-52 support—if a request got to this building, it would be approved. Ambassador Godley declared that the B-52 raids in Northern Laos had produced more BDA than in any other area. The results had been extremely good. He indicated that air activity in Laos had been cut down by the Seventh Air Force, but that he didn't object because the present heavy rains had reduced the effectiveness of air action.

Dr. Kissinger asked if Ambassador Godley foresaw another Communist dry season offensive next year. Ambassador Godley suggested that a peace offensive might be expected instead, which as he had mentioned might be attractive to the Lao. In the face of this, we needed to

maintain our ground capability in the South, and to hit the Trail. Ground action in South Laos depended completely on the help provided by the RLG. All the officers in the SGUs were from the FAR.

Ambassador Godley described the CAS-supported SGU operations in Laos as “superb” in contrast to MACSOG Prairie Fire operations, none of which were undertaken without U.S. participation. There were no U.S. personnel in the SGUs, just Lao. The SGU operations were much better than those in the Prairie Fire program. The CAS program was run by Devlin, the Station Chief in Vientiane.

One other point which Ambassador Godley wanted to raise in connection with the U.S. operations in Laos, as distinct from the Steel Tiger strikes, was that the total cost was less than \$500 million per year, including AID, MASF, CAS, and the bombing. In all this, we were not losing a single American, and we were killing over 30 North Vietnamese a day. \$500 million was what one U.S. division cost us in South Vietnam. In Laos, this same sum enabled us to tie down two North Vietnamese divisions, numerous Binh Tram, plus many trucks and anti-aircraft artillery sites. We were getting a bigger bang for a buck in Laos than anywhere else.

Dr. Kissinger observed that there was no trouble within this Administration concerning anything Ambassador Godley had said. He wondered how long the North Vietnamese could keep going under the circumstances which Ambassador Godley had described. The conversation concluded with a remark by Ambassador Godley that the North Vietnamese could probably go for some time yet, but undoubtedly had been hurt by their losses.⁴

⁴ Nixon met with Godley on July 24 from 10:30 to 10:36 a.m. According to a brief memorandum to the President’s File prepared by Haig, Nixon emphasized that he wanted to increase activities in Laos to let Hanoi know that the Royal Laotian Government could hold out against North Vietnam. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President’s Office Files, Box 81, Memoranda for the President, Beginning July 19) Godley also drafted a memorandum for the record of the meeting. He wrote that Nixon advocated doing the “very utmost to develop an harassing capability in the southern panhandle” of Laos, expeditiously training Cambodian SGU’s, and providing additional funding and manpower for the training program. (*Ibid.*, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, DEF 6 CAMB)

5. **Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon**¹

Washington, July 27, 1970.

SUBJECT

Report From General Walters on Communist Attitudes Regarding Cambodia and Vietnam

We have received a report from General Walters' Communist contacts in Paris which indicates that the Communists were badly hurt in Cambodia, that the Chinese will play an increasingly important political role in Communist operations in Cambodia, and that the Soviets are unwilling to help modernize the North Vietnamese forces further. It also states that the Communists will try to take advantage in a propaganda campaign of material on prisoners and corruption in South Vietnam.

The report (Tab A)² contains the following information, which generally rings true:

Communist Losses in Cambodia: The base and logistics complex was overturned. Coordination has been seriously hindered.

—It was "the toughest setback in twenty years."

—There was a net loss of 60 per cent of all equipment, about 70 per cent of ammunition. Fortunately for them the U.S. and the ARVN did not locate all caches.

—80 per cent of medical supplies were lost, and some 5,000 North Vietnamese wounded died for lack of medical care.

—Soldiers were ordered to try to save two individual weapons rather than crew-served weapons.

—It will take six months to refill depots, and regiments of porters and bearers have been organized.

—It was a considerable shock for the North Vietnamese to be attacked where they felt safe. Cambodia, once a friendly country, is now hostile.

—The loss of border bases makes it difficult to supply Viet Cong forces in South Vietnam.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 510, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. IX. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information. Drafted by Smyser, who forwarded it to Kissinger under a July 23 covering memorandum.

² Attached but not printed is a retyped copy of Walters' undated report.

Weakening of NLF: As a result of the Cambodian operation, the NLF has been reduced to its cadres.

—The Cambodians have executed several hundred NLF cadres.

Military tactics: North Vietnam must try in the next six months to smash Vietnamization, because victories after a U.S. pull-out do not have the same prestige value. The party line is not to admit the Cambodian losses.

—North Vietnam, with its forces spread thin, will move to political action, urban terrorism, denunciation of corruption, tortures, jails, etc.

—Some military actions of sudden and short duration may take place in Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam between the DMZ and Hue.

—Hanoi will refuse to let a Korean situation develop.

—The North Vietnamese army is now technically behind the South Vietnamese in its aviation and its navy.

Chinese help: The Chinese will send political cadres to Cambodia, and will attempt to organize the large Chinese community there to provide protection cover.

—The Chinese will send trucks to help carry supplies.

—But the Chinese cannot make up the technical gap between the South and North Vietnamese armies. And the Soviets are unwilling to do it.

—China will more and more assume the political direction of the war in Cambodia but its direct intervention is not expected. It has set aside \$6 million to develop nets among the Chinese community in Cambodia and stir anti-South Vietnamese feeling.

Negotiations: The nomination of Ambassador Bruce is viewed in a highly favorable light. When the French and the North Vietnamese were negotiating at Pau in the early 1950's, Bruce (then Ambassador to France) sent an observer and showed real interest in Vietnamese independence.

—The North would be ready to tolerate a genuinely neutral South.

—Hanoi is disappointed at the French attitude. Pompidou is not De Gaulle.

Propaganda tactics: The campaign launched by *Life* Magazine on the "tiger cages" has been very helpful to Hanoi in relieving the pressure on treatment of U.S. POW's. Tom Larkin was contacted in Saigon by a Viet Cong cadre who told him of the tiger cages.

—Large-scale corruption scandals about to break out in Saigon will also help this political action. Some Americans as well as South Vietnamese will be involved.

6. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, July 29, 1970.

SUBJECT

Letter from Lon Nol

Our Embassy in Phnom Penh has cabled an informal translation of a letter to you from Lon Nol (Tab A).²

Lon Nol summarizes what is being done to meet the Vietnamese Communist attack, cites the factors which he believes will lead to Cambodian victory, and expresses appreciation for American support (he specifically singles out air support).

Lon Nol goes on to ask for troop and weapons carriers, helicopters and bridging materials to endow the FANK with greater mobility. He also asks "your intervention so that experts (camouflaged) may help us to profit from your experience, from your practices and also from your means as rapidly as possible." This rather veiled request apparently is a proposal that we provide clandestine training to the FANK, and that we outfit units which we train.

The letter, incidentally, cites "the Republican objective" as one of the factors for Cambodian unity, and the seal on the letter is of a new design, omitting the royal symbols.

As our Chargé remarks, the letter appears to have been drafted personally by Lon Nol, and the French original is obscure. I believe we should await the original and obtain an expert translation before considering a reply.³

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 749, Presidential Correspondence, 1969–1974, Cambodia, Prime Minister, Lon Nol (1970). Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information.

² Attached, but not printed, is a retyped, undated, translation of Lon Nol's letter, July 21. The translated text was sent in telegram 1687 from Phnom Penh, July 23. (Ibid.)

³ The President wrote the following at the bottom of the page: "Give it a *very* affirmative reply and *soon* (Don't wait for official translation)." According to a memorandum from Robinson to Moorer, August 14, "Dr. Kissinger opened this morning's NSC Staff Meeting with a scathing condemnation of State's draft reply to Lon Nol's 'sincere letter of 21 July.' Dr. Kissinger stated that a three week delay is inexcusable, particularly when the President has been expecting a response daily." (Moorer Diary, August 14, 1970; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman) Nixon's reply to Lon Nol is Document 26.

7. **Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹**

Washington, August 4, 1970, 5:10–6:45 p.m.

SUBJECT

Cambodia

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

Mr. U. Alexis Johnson

Mr. Marshall Green

Mr. Thomas Pickering

Defense

Mr. David Packard

Mr. Dennis Doolin

JCS

Adm. Thomas H. Moorer

Lt. Gen. John Vogt

CIA

Mr. Richard Helms

Mr. Thomas Karamessines

Mr. William Nelson

NSC Staff

Mr. Richard T. Kennedy

Mr. John H. Holdridge

Mr. David White

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. *Administrative Procedures.* When an issue coming before the WSAG cannot be resolved in three days, it will be presented to the President as a split paper. Each agency will get a chance to present its views, and the issue will then be moved to the President for his decision.

2. *Communications Equipment for Cambodia.* Mr. Packard will confirm the military necessity of the proposed tropo-scatter system in linking Phnom Penh and Saigon, and will advise Mr. Johnson within 24 hours. If the necessity is reconfirmed, Mr. Johnson will withdraw his objections to the proposed tropo-scatter system and the project will be carried out.²

3. *Organization.* Several different groups with the same principals have been dealing with various aspects of the conflict in Southeast Asia. In order to simplify this situation organizationally, this group of principals will now be called the Senior Review Group on Southeast Asia.³

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Top Secret; Nodis. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House.

² In a memorandum to Kissinger, August 11, Kennedy and Holdridge noted that an implementing telegram had been sent and the Embassy informed. (Ibid., Box H-78, WSAG Meetings, WSAG Meeting, 8/4/70)

³ Kennedy, Holdridge, and Lynn recommended creating the group in a memorandum to Kissinger, August 4. Noting that there were numerous NSC groups already

4. *Indonesian AK-47's for Cambodia.* Since DOD expects a delivery of 25 million rounds of AK-47 ammunition in 90 days, the WSAG decided to approve the transfer of 15,000 AK-47's from Indonesia to Cambodia. Replacement weapons (M-16's) for the Indonesians will be flown to Indonesia, and the AK-47's picked up and flown to Cambodia. This procedure will satisfy the Indonesian desire to avoid the appearance of giving direct military aid to Cambodia, since both transfers could be construed as U.S. MAP. Funding of the \$2.5 million for the M-16's for the Indonesians is to be worked out by Mr. Packard and Mr. Johnson. The WSAG favored the use of MAP funds other than Cambodian for the funding, but it was recognized that funds probably would not be available from any other source. To insure that the Cambodians receive operative weapons, Indonesia will be informed that our approval of the project includes the understanding that the AK-47's will be in good condition.⁴

5. *Support for Thai Khmer Units.* DOD is to pay initial family separation allowances for the first 2,000 troops, and to cover the first quarter's pay and allowances after deployment in Cambodia. AID will offset this cost later by making available supporting assistance to cover a Vietnam cost which otherwise would be funded by DOD. The State Department is to make sure the Thais understand that these units must at least nominally be folded into FANK in order that initial equipment needs and operative support can be covered by Cambodian MAP.⁵

6. *Support for Khmer Krom.* The WSAG agreed that this program had to be continued. DOD agreed to cover operating support costs. Pay and allowances are to be covered by AID supporting assistance.⁶

involved in Southeast Asian issues, they argued that a single interagency coordinating group was needed, but impractical in the short-term. As an interim step, they proposed a coordinating group in Kissinger's office headed by them to "ride herd on the various groups in the bureaucracy." Kissinger initialed the memorandum. (Ibid., Box 559, Country Files, Far East, Air Activity in SEA)

⁴ In telegram 128077 to Djakarta, August 7, the Department instructed the Embassy to brief Suharto on the U.S. decision to provide Indonesia with M-16s to replace the AK-47s it would send to Cambodia. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 CAMB/KHMER)

⁵ In telegram 128815 to Bangkok, August 7, the Department informed the Embassy of these decisions and requested comments from the Embassies in Bangkok and Phnom Penh on their host governments' plans for the deployment of the first Thai Khmer regiment. (Ibid.)

⁶ In a memorandum to Kissinger, August 24, Laird argued for continuing the current arrangement: [text not declassified] AID supporting assistance to cover the rest of 1971; and roughly \$1 million in MAP for logistics in FY 1970 and \$7.5 million in 1971. Laird added that Defense was legally obligated to use MAP funds for logistics, because the Khmer Krom were part of the FANK. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 510, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. IX)

7. *Prairie Fire*. Contingent upon Ambassador Godley's response after talking with Souvanna, the expanded *Prairie Fire* program is to be implemented as rapidly as possible. U.S. forces are to participate in intelligence collection but are not to be used in exploitation operations. Non-U.S. personnel are to be trained as rapidly as possible to conduct exploitation operations with training programs to begin immediately. Participation by U.S. personnel in intelligence activity can be used as a jumping-off point from which non-U.S. personnel move into exploitation operations.

8. *Additional Paramilitary Operations in Laos*. The WSAG agreed that projects for recruitment of two additional Lao SGU battalions and six Thai SGU battalions for paramilitary operations in South Laos should go forward. It was further agreed that a desirable but lower priority program would be to upgrade the weapons of the present SGU battalions in Laos. However, no source of funds (approximately \$19.5 million) was found for these projects. Accordingly, the upgrading of weapons will not be considered now. Dr. Kissinger will discuss possible sources of funds for the new units with Secretary Laird.⁷

9. *Response to Lon Nol*. The WSAG agreed that the armored cars and helicopters which Lon Nol requested in his letter to the President⁸ should not be approved. Mr. Green is to draft a reply to Lon Nol emphasizing other forms of U.S. support for Cambodia and skirting the question of armored cars and helicopters.

10. *Thai Troops in Northern Laos*. The previous decision to notify the Thais that their forces in Northern Laos would be required at least through the end of the year and probably into 1971 was confirmed.

11. *U.S. Base at Takhli*. The WSAG agreed that DOD should pull its F-105's out of Takhli, but that the base should be kept open at least until October 1971. It was further agreed that the U.S. should do nothing at this time to indicate that we might withdraw completely from Takhli.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

⁷ In a memorandum to Shultz, August 7, Kissinger noted that the CIA was responsible for those projects but was unable to cover the cost. He asked Shultz to work with Laird on funding, including \$4.8 million for four Cambodian battalions, \$2.5 million for two additional Lao battalions, and \$6.1 million for six Thai battalions. He sent a similar memorandum to Laird noting that Shultz would assist him. (Ibid., Laos, 1 Apr 70 to 11 Aug 70)

⁸ See Document 6.

8. Memorandum From President Nixon to Secretary of State Rogers¹

Washington, August 5, 1970.

SUBJECT

Planning for Southeast Asia

I have read your memorandum of July 27 containing your appraisal of ongoing interdepartmental planning efforts concerning Southeast Asia.² I fully agree that an overall interdepartmental planning mechanism at the Under Secretary level should be established to synthesize the multitude of efforts now under way and to draw up a comprehensive long-range political, military and economic policy document for the area.

However, I believe that the planning framework should be analogous to those other special groups, such as the Special Review Group for the Middle East, with chairmanship under the Assistant for National Security Affairs. This will allow for equal participation by Defense and other agencies where they have a major interest. This system also contemplates that appropriate interdepartmental working groups be established under a Special Review Group for Southeast Asia with chairmanship delegated to representatives of the Department of State where political considerations are paramount.

A Decision Memorandum implementing this conceptual approach will be disseminated in the immediate future.

Richard Nixon

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27–14 ASIA SE. Secret; Sensitive.

² Kissinger forwarded Rogers' July 27 memorandum to Nixon under a covering memorandum, August 3, explaining that it "deals with the criticism made by your Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board concerning the lack of overall military, economic, and political plan for Southeast Asia." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS–65, Memoranda to the President, 1969–1974, August 1970) Nixon met with the PFIAB on July 18 after four members of the board visited Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, and CINCPAC in early June 1970. See *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume VI, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Document 344.

9. Special National Intelligence Estimate¹

SNIE 57–70

Washington, August 6, 1970.

SUBJECT

SNIE 57–70: The Outlook for Cambodia

NOTE

Evidence on many aspects of the Cambodian situation is fragmentary and subject to conflicting interpretations. This is true with respect both to the situation within Cambodia and to communist intentions concerning it. Hence, this Estimate devotes more attention than is usual to identifying areas of particular uncertainty and to assessing alternative explanations. The principal conclusions of this Estimate are stated in Section III.

DISCUSSION

1. In the four months since Sihanouk's ouster, the communists have overrun half of Cambodia, taken or threatened 16 of its 19 provincial capitals, and interdicted—for varying periods—all road and rail links to the capital, Phnom Penh. In the countryside, VC/NVA forces generally continue to move at will, attacking towns and villages in the south and converting the north into an extension of the Laos corridor and a base for "peoples' war" throughout the country and in South Vietnam as well.

2. This being the situation, survival of the Lon Nol government will depend heavily on the extent of foreign assistance as well as on the will and ability of the people and their leaders to organize themselves for effective military resistance to the communists; on the unity and morale of the country in the face of hardship, destruction, and death; and on the reaction to the divisive political appeals issued in Sihanouk's name. But of equal or greater importance are the capabilities and intentions of the Vietnamese communists; the extent to which they can bring pressures to bear on the Lon Nol government and the degree to which they are willing to allocate available resources to such an effort.

[Omitted here is the body of the report.]

¹ Source: Central Intelligence Agency, NIC Files: Job 79–R01012A, Box 390, SNIE 57–70, Outlook for Cambodia. Secret; Spoke. The CIA and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State and Defense, and the NSA, participated in the preparation of this estimate. All members of the USIB concurred in the estimate except the representatives of the AEC and FBI who abstained on the grounds that it was outside their jurisdiction.

10. Memorandum for the Record¹

Washington, August 6, 1970.

SUBJECT

DCI Meeting with the PFIAB, 6 August 1970

1. The DCI met with the PFIAB at 1100 hours on August 6th. In addition to the DCI, there were present the Chairman, Admiral George W. Anderson; Ambassador Robert Murphy; Dr. Franklin Murphy; Dr. Edwin Land; Dr. William Baker; Messrs. Frank Pace and Gordon Gray; and Messrs. [*names not declassified*].

2. Prior to the meeting the Chairman had asked the Director to comment on the implications of a coalition government in Vietnam and the Director opened his discussion on this subject. Specifically the question was, "What is wrong with Viet Cong in the government?" The Director referred to the experience of the last 25 years with coalition governments involving Communist participation. He pointed out that there are several reasons why the present South Vietnamese government would be most reluctant to agree to representation by the NLF in such a government. Inevitably the Communist representatives in such a government would attempt to take it over. Moreover, as the NLF is simply an extension of the North Vietnamese government, such an arrangement would amount to an agreement to North Vietnamese participation in the government.

3. Dr. Land wanted to know what the size of the Communist representation would be in the event they were permitted to vote. The answer was that nobody knows precisely. The Director pointed out that Thieu was convinced that he could win an election. He thought that the ratio of Communists to non-Communists might be 60–40 but clarified his statement by pointing out that there is no real way of identifying the Communists or of assessing their strength. He pointed out that the South Vietnamese constitution forbids Communist participation in the government. After some further general discussion it was agreed that Mr. Donohue would pursue the question further at his appearance which was scheduled for the following day.

4. The Director then addressed the question of our intelligence capabilities for ascertaining the intentions of the North Vietnamese and

¹ Source: Central Intelligence Agency, Executive Registry Subject Files: Job 80–B01086A, Box 3, PFIAB and Annual Reports. Top Secret; Byeman. Drafted on August 7 by [*name not declassified*], Director of the Office of National Intelligence Programs Evaluation, Central Intelligence Agency. Copies were sent to Helms and Karamessines.

the Chinese. He pointed out that, because of the structure, security and discipline of the regime in both countries, we have no high level penetrations. He referred to Collingwood's book, *The Defector*,² as a good description of the political environment in Hanoi.

5. As regards our specific coverage of North Vietnam, the Director described certain audio surveillance operations, using the take from some of these as illustrations of our capacity to monitor North Vietnamese attitudes and intentions. He described a number of other operational programs, including third party activity and a number of access agents. He pointed out that by and large our assessments of North Vietnamese intentions have been accurate. Over the years conclusions about their military and political intentions, particularly as regards their will to persist, have been "on the mark."

6. Dr. Baker wanted to know whether the President continues to get conflicting assessments from the Departments of State and Defense. The Director indicated that this is probably true. In answer to a question from Admiral Anderson, he stated that the substance of sensitive intelligence coverage is conveyed directly to the President and the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense.

7. Ambassador Murphy wanted to know about any indications of dissidence or insurgency in North Vietnam. Assuming the determination of the leadership, he wanted to know how effective its controls were over the population. The Director pointed out that morale had deteriorated somewhat after the cessation of the bombing but that there was no evidence of anything amounting to revolt or insurgency.

8. Both Ambassador Murphy and Mr. Gray wanted to know whether our penetration efforts would be more successful if we had unlimited funds—if we had all the money in the world, would we be more successful? The Director said that it was hard to tell. Unlimited funds might help. On the other hand, our experience to date has not indicated that money is much of a factor in influencing defections from any of the Communist countries. Speaking of money, the Director pointed out that it is very short and referred to the difficulty the government has experienced in identifying funds for Cambodia.

9. Dr. Frank Murphy referred to his own experience during his trip through Southeast Asia³ during the course of which he said that conversations with local officials had tended to confirm the Director's assessment of North Vietnamese policies.

[Omitted here is material unrelated to Vietnam.]

² Reference is to a novel, *The Defector*, by Charles Collingwood (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

³ See footnote 2, Document 8.

11. **Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon**¹

Washington, August 7, 1970.

SUBJECT

The U.S. Position on Coalition in South Vietnam

There is reason for concern in the turn which the U.S. public discussion of a coalition government in South Vietnam appears to be taking. We may soon be faced with the following problems:

—We may find ourselves negotiating with ourselves and with the American press. This has never led to good results in past administrations. We have to take either softer or harder positions than we want, and we lose flexibility.

—We may have to deal with the almost absurd argument that the South Vietnamese Government is alone blocking peace and is compelling us to follow its lead.

—We may also be faced with harder Hanoi pressure on this point. The North Vietnamese feel we may be vulnerable on this issue and that we may have to make some concessions under public pressure. They have been pushing their line on a coalition hard in Paris.

—We may also generate adverse sentiment in Saigon if we give the impression that we are taking the lead on this topic, not just within the South Vietnamese Government but among many South Vietnamese political elements who oppose a coalition.

In order to overcome some of these problems, I believe we should do the following:

—Refuse from now on to talk about a coalition government, merely stating that our position on this point has been set forth in your statements and requires no elaboration.

—We should at some appropriate point emphasize the intransigence of the other side. The South Vietnamese position and ours is that the NLF can freely participate in free elections. This is much more forthcoming than the North Vietnamese demand that the present government in Saigon be renounced as a precondition to negotiations. The

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 148, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam 1 Aug 70. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. According to a routing slip, Nixon saw the memorandum on August 11. This memorandum is based on a memorandum from Smyser to Kissinger, July 31. Holdridge forwarded a revised version to Kissinger under an August 5 covering memorandum. (Ibid., Box 189, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, 1 July 70–Sep 70)

GVN has also said that it will accept the results of free elections, which Hanoi and the NLF have never pledged to do.

In line with this, I have informed the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff that there should be no further speculation or discussion of coalition government, cease-fire, or withdrawals. I have told them that our positions have been stated and do not require further elaboration.²

² On August 4, Kissinger sent memoranda to Rogers, Laird, Helms, and Moorer, instructing them to this effect and asking them to forward copies to Bruce, Bunker, and Abrams. (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–76–67, Box 88, Viet 092, Jan–Aug 1970)

12. Editorial Note

On August 7, 1970, President Richard Nixon announced the appointment of former astronaut Colonel Frank Borman as his Special Representative on Prisoners of War. Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Henry Kissinger described Borman to the President as an “ideal choice, since he is a well-known figure who has made many friends around the world and has a sympathetic understanding of the nature of the POW problem.” He added that Borman “possesses a great deal of energy and enthusiasm” and was “prepared to undertake the assignment immediately.” (Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, August 6; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 94, Vietnam Subject Files, U.S. POWs in North Vietnam, Vol. I)

The President met briefly with Borman on August 7 to discuss the position and his plan for a worldwide trip. Borman explained to the President that he planned to visit 14 countries. Of these, he believed that the most significant would be a stop in Algeria, which he claimed “was in close touch with the Viet Cong,” and the Soviet Union, where he hoped to meet with representatives of the North Vietnamese Government and arrange a trip to Hanoi. The President felt that a trip to Hanoi was an excellent idea, but cautioned Borman to check with Kissinger to ensure that the visit would not complicate “conditions world wide and especially the situation in Paris at the peace talk table.” The memorandum for the file is *ibid.*, White House Special Files, President’s Office Files, Box 81, Memoranda for the President, Beginning August 2, 1970.

Borman departed August 10 and returned to the United States on September 1. In a September 1 memorandum to the President, Kissinger reported that Borman visited 12 countries and met with leading national figures and top international Red Cross officials. Kissinger noted Borman's success with the Algerian Foreign Minister in pressing the North Vietnamese leadership for better treatment of POWs. He added that Borman was unable to arrange a meeting with the North Vietnamese, who denounced the trip. During Borman's stop in South Vietnam, Kissinger noted that he inspected South Vietnamese prison camps, most notably Con Son prison where reports of prisoner abuse and the use of "tiger cages"—five by nine foot stone and steel cages that held up to three prisoners at a time—to discipline internees, had received negative media attention. Kissinger wrote that Borman had stated publicly that the "'tiger cages' controversy had been blown out of proportion by the press" and that more needed to be done to "publicize the generally good treatment of prisoners held by the South Vietnamese." (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 94, Vietnam Subject Files, U.S. POWs in North Vietnam, Vol. I)

Upon his return to the United States, Borman stopped in San Clemente on September 2 to meet with the President. No record of the meeting has been found. Borman spoke with the press following the meeting to discuss his trip and POW issues. A transcript of the press conference is in the Department of State *Bulletin*, September 28, 1970, pages 345–346.

13. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, August 7, 1970.

SUBJECT

Air Activity in Southeast Asia

On April 17 you directed that air activity levels in Southeast Asia be maintained until July 30. Following that decision, you authorized a

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 559, Country Files, Far East, Air Act in SEA, Vol. I, 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for action.

Vietnam Special Studies Group evaluation of alternative FY 71 air activity programs for your consideration.²

The Air Effort in Southeast Asia

Since August, 1969 the U.S. has flown an average of about 20,100 tactical air, 1400 B-52, and 640 gunship sorties per month with an annual cost of \$3.1 billion. In addition, our allies' air forces have flown about 4,500 tactical air sorties. The total Allied tactical air effort of 24,600 monthly sorties carried out a wide variety of tasks related to its principal missions of support of ground forces and interdiction:

—*In Southern Laos*, about 8,200 tactical air sorties were used in the interdiction campaign, including some 4,400 sorties against trucks or truck parks and 2,100 sorties against enemy roads and bridges. The remainder were used against enemy AAA and other targets.

—*In South Vietnam*, roughly 11,400 tactical air sorties (one fourth contributed by VNAF) were used for direct support of ground forces (4,800 sorties) and indirect support (6,600 sorties). Indirect support consisted of strikes against "known" (2,300 sorties) and "suspected" (4,300) enemy locations.

—*In Northern Laos*, about 5,000 attack sorties (one third by the RLAf) were employed in support of the RLG forces—some 3,100 in direct support of the Meo guerrillas and another 1,900 sorties in attacks on enemy lines of communication or enemy-controlled areas.

Overall, the U.S. air effort was weighted about equally between interdiction of enemy manpower or supply movements and the support of ground forces in Northern Laos and South Vietnam.

The Alternative Air Programs

In addition to the current sortie levels, (19,000 tactical air sorties) the VSSG study developed two basic alternative U.S. air programs for FY 71:

—*Alternative 1*. This includes about 14,000 tactical air, 1,000 B-52, and 1,000 gunship sorties monthly at an annual cost of \$2.4 billion. It is similar to the sortie levels planned by DOD for FY 71 within its existing fiscal guidance.

—*Alternative 2*. This includes about 10,000 tactical air, 700 B-52, and 1,000 gunship sorties monthly at an annual cost of \$1.8 billion.

² According to minutes of a July 30 VSSG meeting held at the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles, the level of air activity was discussed, and the group agreed to pose the issues for decision in a memorandum to Nixon. (Ibid., NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-3, Vietnam Special Studies Group, 3)

While these alternative programs would involve substantial reductions in air activity, there are some key missions that each could carry out:

—*In South Vietnam*, maintain *direct* support of Allied forces at or above recent levels with a *substantial* increase in air support for RVNAF. In fact, with the accelerated turnover of equipment planned by MACV, the GVN alone should be able by end FY 71 to provide its forces as much direct air support as they have required recently. However, in addition to direct support, the U.S. would be able to provide substantial indirect air support under each of the alternatives.

—*In South Laos*, continue an intensive effort to destroy enemy supplies moving to South Vietnam and, depending on the level of enemy effort, maintain the destruction of enemy supplies during this coming year at last year's level. We could do this by increasing our emphasis on attacking trucks while deploying larger numbers of gunships for this purpose. These converted cargo planes are able to destroy 4.0 trucks per sortie compared to only .3 for the average jet aircraft.

—*In North Laos*, continue to provide U.S. support to RLG forces to help them defend against an enemy Dry Season offensive this year as well as providing support if they should themselves undertake a Wet Season offensive.

While each of the alternative Programs would allow us to maintain these capabilities, other areas would receive a lesser emphasis and level of effort than under our current effort. For example,

—*Under Alternative 1* (14,000 sorties per month), the reduction might involve *either* (a) greatly reducing our attacks on enemy roads and bridges (as opposed to trucks) and storage areas in South Laos or (b) stopping the attacks on "suspected" enemy locations in South Vietnam that now absorb about 40% of our effort.

—*Under Alternative 2* (10,000 sorties per month), the sharper reduction might involve largely ending attacks on enemy roads and bridges and "suspected" enemy locations in South Vietnam.

The assessment of the consequences of reducing overall sortie levels depends on the effectiveness of particular types of strikes in each mission, as well as the overall effectiveness of the entire air effort. To provide this evaluation of effectiveness, the VSSG examined the differences in views on our air activity and the substantive bases for these differences. The main issues to emerge were:

—*In Southern Laos*, we have conclusive COMINT evidence that the enemy met his supply objectives during the last Dry Season and maintained enough throughput to South Vietnam to support his forces there. However, we do not know whether the goals the enemy established were lower because of our interdiction, i.e. whether our interdiction

merely raises the costs to them of carrying out their plans or whether it scales back their plans.

—The JCS believe that our interdiction effort actually limits enemy plans and activity in South Vietnam.

—OSD and the CIA find that almost no realistic level of interdiction could effectively stop the enemy from moving whatever amount of supplies to South Vietnam he desires; we merely raise the cost to him of carrying out his plan.

The CIA/OSD view is supported by evidence that our interdiction destroys only a small fraction of enemy traffic (13% of his moving trucks). Moreover, we know that the enemy can replace these losses fairly easily (only \$200 million in supplies destroyed since 1967) at little cost to North Vietnam itself, since the Soviets foot the bill. Further, in the past, the enemy has proved that he can double his supply flows from year to year and meet his planned throughput goals without operating anywhere near capacity and in spite of our bombing. For these reasons, it seems likely that he can further increase his throughput in the future even at present levels of interdiction or alternatively, that some reduction in effort will not affect the enemy's plans in the South.

—*In South Vietnam*, the direct support of Allied forces absorbs at most only 40% of our air effort in South Vietnam; the major portion of our effort is devoted to strikes against "known" or "suspected" enemy locations with results that are unknowable. OSD finds³ that these strikes are merely "bombing holes in the jungle" with little results. The JCS admit that these strikes are less valuable than direct support but maintain that reducing the pressure on the enemy base areas or LOCs could result in an improved tactical situation for the enemy.

These differences cannot be objectively resolved, though I definitely think that OSD and the CIA have a stronger case than the JCS based on the evidence presented. However, aside from its military effects, any change in overall sortie levels involves a number of broader issues:

—*Resource Implications*. The current DOD fiscal guidance includes funds for 14,000 tactical air sorties monthly. If the current program of 18,700 sorties were maintained, other SEA programs would probably have to be reduced by some \$600 million. (A U.S. combat division in Vietnam costs about \$0.8–\$1.2 billion per year.)

—*Enemy Reaction*. The study finds that the reductions posed in air activities are "unlikely to bring about any significant shift in North Vietnam's military behavior." The JCS believe that any reduction would

³ The President underlined "against 'known' or 'suspected' enemy locations with results that are unknowable. OSD finds" and wrote in the margin, "I agree."

encourage the North Vietnamese to take a more aggressive posture in both North Laos and South Vietnam.

—*Allied Reaction.* Our allies in Southeast Asia, particularly Thailand, will be concerned about significant reductions in U.S. air activity in Southeast Asia. Moreover, the reductions posed would allow the closure of up to two bases in South Vietnam and two bases in Thailand.

—*Military Risks.* By “surging” our aircraft and rapidly redeploying one aircraft carrier, we could increase our sortie levels from 14,000 to 22,000 monthly under Alternative 1 and 10,000 to 18,000 monthly under Alternative 2. This should enable us to handle the sortie requirements for a number of major contingencies (enemy offensives in SVN, Laos, or Cambodia, a short intense campaign in North Vietnam, etc.), but we could not handle them all simultaneously or launch an intensive long term campaign against North Vietnam without redeploying forces.

Thus, in choosing a sortie level, the tightness of the present Vietnam budget and the savings that would accrue from a sortie cut need to be balanced against the reactions of our Allies and the North Vietnamese and the effects on our military programs.

The views of your advisors are as follows:

—The JCS recommend that the current program of 19,200 tactical air sorties be maintained through FY 71. In the opinion (Tab B)⁴ of General Abrams and the JCS, any reduction in air activity will “increase the risks to friendly forces and military objectives.” They believe we should seek a supplemental appropriation to pay the extra cost.

—Secretary Laird finds (Tab C)⁵ that no more than 14,000 tactical air sorties monthly are necessary to meet our objectives in SEA and that air activity below this level may well be enough to meet our needs, particularly during periods of low enemy activity or bad weather in South Laos or Vietnam. Therefore, he wants to maintain the forces appropriate to Alternative 1 but, if General Abrams believes it prudent, fly as few as 10,000 sorties (Alternative 2) in the month when enemy activity is low.

Dick Helms believes that the sortie levels proposed by Secretary Laird will prove adequate to meet the needs for support of Meo forces in Northern Laos.

I recommend that you approve Secretary Laird’s recommendation: a maximum FY 71 sortie level of 14,000 tactical air sorties monthly (Alternative 1) with the understanding that actual sortie levels will be less than the funded

⁴ Attached but not printed is a July 29 memorandum, CM-94-70, from Moorer to Kissinger.

⁵ Attached but not printed is a July 23 memorandum from Laird to Kissinger.

rate, but higher than 10,000 sorties monthly (Alternative 2). In my opinion, this level of air activity is fully adequate to provide support to the allied ground forces while maintaining some pressure on enemy base areas and supply lines in Laos, South Vietnam, and Cambodia.

Approve Secretary Laird's Recommendation⁶

Approve JCS Recommendation

U.S. Bases in Southeast Asia

With a reduction in U.S. air activity, we could make a significant reduction in our personnel and base structure in Southeast Asia. On military grounds, two bases in South Vietnam and two in Thailand could be closed over the coming year. As you know, these closures could lead to concern on the part of our Allies, particularly the Thais:

—*Thailand* will be very concerned about the reduction in air activity as it becomes manifest in personnel reductions and base closures. Alex Johnson feels that withdrawal of more than the 10,000 men already planned for FY 71 or closure of more than one U.S. base (Takhli) could cause "serious complications in U.S./Thai relations."

—*Laos* will accept the reduction in U.S. activity if they are given assurance of adequate U.S. support if the North Vietnamese launch a major offensive this Fall. Since we will be able to provide these assurances, even with reduced force levels, the RLG reaction should not be too adverse.

—*South Vietnam* already expects some reductions in U.S. air operations over the coming year in line with improvements in VNAF capabilities and U.S. withdrawals. The closure of one U.S. base (Chu Lai) has been long expected and the second (Tuy Hoa) will be no great surprise.

Thus, while the GVN and RLG reaction is not expected to be too adverse, we face a significant problem with Thailand. Because of these political problems, Dave Packard has deferred any decision on the closure of a second base in Thailand even though the closure of the first base (Takhli) is already planned. In regard to Takhli, there are two principal alternatives:

—*Closure*. OSD has suggested that Takhli be closed and all U.S. personnel withdrawn by June 1971.

—*Caretaker Operation*. Alex Johnson recommends that after the U.S. forces on the base are redeployed, a small U.S. caretaker force (350 men)

⁶ The President initialed his approval and wrote the following: "I believe even this is too high on the strategic side—not enough tactical. This study shows the hopeless inadequacy of Air Force. I want a *new* study for a *new* approach. This (Laird's) is just cutting down everything equally. I want a new policy, not just cuts in *old* programs."

be retained at Takhli to keep it open until the Thais are able to operate it and its closure will not have serious political ramifications (perhaps until October 1971). I share his view.

Approve Closure of Takhli by June 1971

Approve Caretaker Operation (My recommendation.)⁷

*Recommendation*⁸

That you approve the enclosed NSDM (Tab A)⁹ accepting Secretary Laird's recommendations that FY 71 sortie levels be planned between 10,000 and 14,000 sorties monthly and that two bases in South Vietnam be closed with the base in Thailand (Takhli) maintained on a standby basis.

⁷ The President initialed his approval of both options.

⁸ The President initialed his approval and wrote the following: "I approve it *only* temporarily, but I want a new basic *policy* recommendation *in 30 days*."

⁹ Tab A is a draft NSDM, printed as revised as Document 20.

14. Memorandum for the Record¹

Washington, August 7, 1970.

SUBJECT

Minutes of the Meeting of the 40 Committee, 7 August 1970

PRESENT

Mr. Kissinger, Mr. Mitchell, Mr. Packard, Mr. Johnson, Admiral Moorer, and General Cushman

Mr. William Broe was present for Item 1.

Mr. Fred Valtin was present for Item 2.

Mr. William Wells was present for Items 4, 5 and 6.

Mr. Archibald Roosevelt was present for Items 7 and 8.

Ambassador David D. Newsom was present for Item 8.

Messrs. Thomas Karamessines and Wymberley Coer were present for all items.

[Omitted here is material unrelated to Vietnam.]

¹ Source: Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, 40 Committee Meetings. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by Jessup on August 10.

4. *South Vietnam—Proposed Support of the Farmers-Workers Party*

The proposed support of the Farmers-Workers Party in South Vietnam was approved.² Mr. Johnson noted that Tran Quoc Buu, President of the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor, around whom the project was conceived, was one of the more earnest and competent figures in that country.

5. *South Vietnam—Periodic Report on the National Social Democratic Front*

The periodic report on the National Social Democratic Front was rather gloomily described by Mr. Wells, who indicated that Thieu had never had his heart in nor fully supported the concept; he would utilize any success it achieved for his own ends but would do nothing to strengthen the Front.³ Mr. Mitchell asked what Thieu was doing with the money, and Mr. Wells indicated that, as far as was known, Thieu himself had retained the unexpended sum of approximately [*dollar amount not declassified*]. It was noted that Ambassador Bunker had not asked recently for further support.

6. *North Vietnam—Covert Operations*

On Mr. Packard's memorandum on covert operations in North Vietnam dated 25 June 1970,⁴ an inventory of capabilities, the Chairman observed that he could hardly present this Sears Roebuck-type catalogue of possibilities to higher authority. He asked DOD to come up with some operational plans—two or three—on those capabilities which were the most palatable.

[Omitted here is material unrelated to Vietnam.]

Peter Jessup

² Reference is to an attached memorandum, not printed, prepared for the 40 Committee on July 23. The proposal called for a limited, one-time payment [*dollar amount not declassified*], which had been approved by Ambassador Bunker and the Department of State.

³ Reference is to an attached periodic report, not printed, prepared for the 40 Committee on June 15 that covered the period January 1 to March 31, 1970. It noted that Thieu was only giving limited attention to the NSDF, but was "inclined to support ten NSDF candidates in the Senate elections" even though the member parties wanted him to support more. According to the report, the relationship between Thieu and the parties was "tenuous and could be upset by untoward future events."

⁴ Attached but not printed is a covering memorandum from Packard to Kissinger, June 25, that summarized a Department of Defense and JCS report on some possible uses for covert assets. Packard wrote that the report "should not be construed as representing my position or that of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on either the types of operations to be conducted or the broad issue of advisability of resuming covert operations against North Vietnam."

15. Diary Entry by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)¹

Washington, August 8, 1970.

1145

Met with Lieutenant General Knowles and discussed the paramilitary operations problem we had in Laos and Cambodia. Once again it is a short term and a long term problem. With a slight extension of Prairie Fire we can get the ARVN action started. I had previously directed Lieutenant General Vogt to prepare a paper showing what is the maximum we can do, bearing in mind our realistic constraints (i.e., political, assets, etc.).

On the subject of MACSOG discussed at the 40 Committee meeting,² the president wants an inventory of resources for paramilitary operations in North Vietnam. I am opposed because I feel paramilitary operations in isolation are not productive. However, Kissinger feels that a coordinated effort might pay off. There is no point, for example, in capturing North Vietnamese if we give them back as fast as we capture them. Our paper should show those alternate courses of action which we can do and then recommend against them, ending up saying in effect, "However, if it is desired to put pressure on the enemy, in lieu of these courses of action, we can do such and such."

[Omitted here is material unrelated to Vietnam.]

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Moorer Diary, July 1970–July 1974. Top Secret.

² See Document 14.

16. **Memorandum From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)**¹

Washington, August 9, 1970.

SUBJECT

Vietnam Troop Levels

I am not sure that you have any conception of the degree to which Laird has painted the President into a corner on our Vietnam troop levels. My discussions with the Army Staff and members of the Joint Staff confirm that Laird has under-funded the Army to a degree that it will no longer be possible to come anywhere near meeting the levels we had anticipated for the remainder of the fiscal year. Even worse, he established draft quotas of 10,000 a month which have already deprived the Army of the ability to provide the force levels necessary to meet the goals we were considering even if the funds were made available. This disastrous bit of management chicanery has resulted in General Westmoreland in desperation proposing new withdrawal schedules which can most seriously jeopardize the security of our remaining forces in Vietnam. It will involve an expedited withdrawal of forces not only between now and October, but more importantly, between now and December, and result in a drastically weakened U.S. force posture by the time of Tet in February. The picture is so much more gloomy than anything ever presented through channels to us that I suspect the President himself is not aware of the kinds of risks that Laird has already preordained.

I know that Laird has cushioned this upcoming catastrophe with you in passing in his usual indirect way and you may yourself be aware of what is in the wind. If you are not, however, I believe it is essential that you demand that Laird meet with you today or tomorrow and provide you with a detailed briefing of the order of magnitude of this problem which, in my view, cannot be overestimated.

Attached is a summary of the kinds of force level figures that are being considered and which are intimately affected and could be further complicated by the issue of: (a) the timing of withdrawals from Korea; (b) the timing and scope of air drawdowns from Thailand; and (c) the level of sortie rates for Southeast Asia.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 95, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam Troop Replacement, 1970. No classification marking.

The most serious aspect of this problem is that we are no longer able to correct it even if the President decided to do so because of the insidious way in which Laird reduced draft calls and thereby has made it totally impossible for the Army to maintain approved force levels in Vietnam even if Laird had provided the money.

Attachment

Washington, undated.

SUMMARY OF FORCE LEVEL CONSIDERATIONS

—As you know, only force levels currently approved by the President provided for a 50,000 man drawdown by October 15 and a total drawdown from the present authorized level of 150,000 spaces during the spring. (The Pentagon has been using April 30 as their target date.)

—Despite the foregoing, Laird directed the JCS to prepare alternate plans for more severe drawdowns. In response, the JCS developed two alternatives:

1. Alternative A: 150,000 space reductions by April 30 with 50,000 by October 15; 10,000 more by December 31, and 90,000 between February 15 and April 30.
2. Alternative B: 60,000 by October 15; 40,000 by December 31, and 50,000 by April 30.

—The JCS recommended Alternative A with supplemental funding.

—Subsequently, on the 23rd of July the Secretary of the Army pointed out that the Army would be unable to support Alternative A because of both funds and manpower short-falls resulting from reduced draft calls. The Secretary also pointed out that the Army can only meet Alternative B if draft calls are raised from the Laird recommended 10,000 a month to 12,500 a month, and even these considerations are fundamentally affected by the timing of our withdrawals from Korea, air sortie levels approved for Southeast Asia, and associated drawdown in strength in Thailand.

—An idea of the order of magnitude of the problem is gained from the realization that the JCS Plan A would cost the Army \$90 million more in obligation authority than they have been given. The OMA portion of the request adds \$370 million in obligations to the original FY 71 budget. Low draft calls and larger than expected personnel losses will result in personnel short-falls during the fall, winter and spring averaging 56,000 men. Even with short-falls worldwide of about ten percent this means that we will have short-falls of 10,000 to 15,000 spaces in Vietnam over the period.

—As a result of the foregoing, I understand that Laird has developed a new option which would provide for 120,000 forces being out of Vietnam by the end of December with a residual force level of 240,000 in Vietnam by July 1.

—Laird's monetary and draft call finagling has resulted in a period of most serious personnel turbulence in the Army. His management has resulted in significantly larger than programmed manpower losses in the Army as a whole and Vietnam in particular. It has caused an unprecedented rate of resignations among the officer corps and a drastically reduced rate of re-enlistments.

17. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, August 10, 1970.

SUBJECT

Decision on U.S. Economic Policy for Vietnam

Purpose

This memorandum:

—reviews briefly the current economic situation in South Vietnam and the long term problems facing the GVN economy;

—presents for your decision two alternative U.S. economic policies and associated funding options for FY 71.

Current Situation and Long-Term Vietnamization Problems

Current Situation—The cost of living in Vietnam has risen 23% over the last six months and 53% over the last year.

GVN foreign exchange reserves have fallen to the lowest level since 1966, forcing the GVN to cut back sales of foreign exchange to importers. Because imports are an important source of goods to the GVN economy (roughly one-fourth), high demand for limited imports has caused consumers and importers to hoard imported goods. Demand for domestically produced goods has also risen due to the shift of pur-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-218, NSDMs, NSDM 80. Secret. Sent for action. According to an attached routing slip, Lynn sent the memorandum to Kissinger on August 7.

chasing power to these goods as well as a general loss of confidence in the piaster.

These speculative pressures are now serious. Continued price increases reward those who have lost confidence in the piaster and have caused unrest among low income groups, such as the veterans and civil servants.

Long-Term Vietnamization Problems—Besides coping with the current situation the GVN must:

—fund the additional budgetary costs of a 10% increase in Vietnamese forces,

—provide incentives for economic growth and exports and increase domestic tax revenues in order to enable Vietnam to achieve increased self-sufficiency,

—increase official civilian and military wages to restore some of the 50% to 100% loss in real purchasing power since 1966 caused by inflation.

To dampen speculative pressures in the short term while encouraging growth and self-sufficiency in the long term is the agreed goal for the Vietnamese economy. The key issue is how to do it.

Two Options

Essentially there are two views:

—(1) DOD has strongly urged that the GVN adopt a flexible exchange rate system whereby the piaster price of dollars would vary from day-to-day depending on the demand for imports and the dollar reserves of the GVN.² This would be tantamount to a 75% to 100% devaluation (from 250 piasters per dollar currently to 450 or 500 per dollar) to be followed by gradual adjustments of the new rate.

According to the DOD proposal, this Administration would ask Congress for a \$100 million AID supplemental to provide the GVN with an incentive to institute a flexible rate, a move the GVN currently opposes. This \$100 million would be used to support the new rate so as to preclude sharp day-to-day fluctuations. For example if there were a sudden demand for dollars by speculators, a portion of the \$100

² The memorandum from Laird to Nixon, July 18, describing this course of action is in the Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330-74-142. On August 11, Laird sent Kissinger a follow-up memorandum that reiterated: "The effort of the South Vietnamese through monetary, fiscal, and other economic reforms to maximize utilization of their own economic resources, as well as those we provide, is not moving forward. Such problems in fact jeopardize the Vietnamization effort. I urge, therefore, that the President address as a matter of first priority the questions now before him concerning U.S. economic policy for Vietnam." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 148, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam, 1 August 1970)

[million] fund would be released to satisfy this demand, thus preventing a sharp drop in the exchange rate, cooling off the speculation, and stabilizing the foreign exchange markets.

—(2) The Mission in Saigon with the support of State, Treasury, AID and OMB is urging the adoption of a series of complex measures that would permit the GVN to reduce inflationary pressures by a highly selective rather than across-the-board devaluation:

—The GVN would continue to import essential commodities at the current 250 per dollar exchange rate, but would institute a higher adjustable exchange rate on non-essential imports (thus discouraging them), on exports (thus encouraging them), and on the purchase of dollars by Vietnamese who want to build up bank accounts or investments abroad (thus discouraging this leakage of dollars).

—This option could require up to a \$50 million increase in U.S. assistance to be used for additional imports. It could be funded with either: (a) an AID supplemental or (b) from the current DOD budget.

Pro and Con Arguments

Option 1—The principal arguments for Option 1 (DOD's choice) are:

—After the initial major devaluation, the piaster-dollar exchange rate would be adjusted to meet speculative pressures. Thus future major devaluations, with the attendant political problems, would be precluded by small day-to-day exchange rate adjustments.

—The GVN could open up import licensing at the higher exchange rate without fear of expending all of its foreign exchange, because at the higher rate dollars (and imports) would be much more expensive. Presently the dollars are so cheap that the government would quickly lose all its scarce reserves if it opened up import licensing. However, the present system provides windfall profits to those favored few who do get licenses, because they can sell the goods they import cheaply at much higher prices. Thus a major argument for the DOD proposal is that it would sharply curtail the profits the favored importers can now earn because they can buy dollars at an artificially low price.

These are strong arguments. Nonetheless the DOD proposal has serious disadvantages:

—An across-the-board devaluation to a flexible rate now would raise the prices of all imports including essential foodstuffs and fertilizer as well as Hondas, two to threefold. Moreover, nobody is sure the rate would not go higher. The effect of such price increase on large classes of people—peasants, urban private sector workers, and public employees—would be to cause a sharp loss in their real incomes. In some cases families would be pushed to near-subsistence income levels.

—The GVN may simply refuse to institute a single flexible rate on all transactions. President Thieu is opposed to a full-fledged devaluation.

—It is debatable whether Congress would approve the \$100 million AID supplemental for FY 71 and doubtful that such assistance could be approved soon enough to permit it to be used to help solve the GVN's short term economic problems.

Option 2—The principal advantages of Option 2 (the Mission's proposal) are:

—A sharp drop in income for peasants, urban, and government workers is not expected because the exchange rate for essential imports would not be changed.

—This option is consistent with the GVN's current plans and with President Thieu's determination not to execute a full devaluation.

—This option can be funded without going to Congress for a supplemental because there are enough funds available within the DOD budget to fund the \$10 million to \$50 million required. Thus it can be implemented in time to solve the immediate problem. In the meantime we can consider a better long term arrangement.

The disadvantages of Option 2 are:

—It does not provide for periodic exchange rate adjustments in the future. Thus the GVN will be faced with the necessity to execute a major devaluation after the 1971 Presidential elections.

—If the exchange rate adjustment made by the GVN on non-essential imports is not great enough, there may not be enough foreign exchange to open up import licensing. This would require the continued rationing of import licenses, and those fortunate to get a license would receive windfall profits as they do today. Thus an evil of the present setup would continue.

My Recommendation

Option 2 is favored by State, OMB, the Mission, Treasury, AID and is consistent with the current GVN plan that is emerging from consultations with the IMF.

The consequences of the DOD proposal could be serious for the GVN and Vietnamization. In any case the GVN will probably reject it. DOD's concern that we face up to the longer term implications of not executing a full-scale devaluation now is well taken. But this concern is probably best dealt with within the framework of Option 2, which calls for a partial devaluation now (on non-essentials), but no drastic and unpredictable reforms.

Therefore I recommend you approve Option 2 with the stipulations that:

—The resulting \$750 million South Vietnamese import level should be viewed as the ceiling for U.S.-provided foreign exchange for FY 71

and beyond. The level of foreign exchange provided by the U.S. should decline thereafter as domestic production rises.

—It is U.S. policy that the GVN should maintain and adjust exchange rates on non-essential imports in a manner consistent with the level of foreign exchange provided so as to minimize and preclude windfall profits.³

Funding

If Option 2 is acceptable, additional funding of up to \$50 million above that currently planned for FY 71 may be required, although current estimates indicate that only an additional \$10 million is needed.

This could be provided by:

—asking Congress to approve a special AID supplemental,

—adjusting DOD's currently authorized outlay ceiling. (OMB would increase DOD's \$71.8 billion ceiling by the needed amount and still not exceed the Defense authorization you have requested from the Congress.)

There are strong arguments against seeking a supplemental:

—it might not be approved, particularly considering the attitude of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee,

—even if approval were possible it would follow a long debate that could result in the funds not being available soon enough to alleviate the near term speculative crisis,

—debate on a supplemental could hold up approval of the Foreign Assistance and Foreign Military Sales Acts now before Congress,

—securing Congressional approval for the Korean and Cambodian supplementals should be the principal goals of our FY 71 Congressional strategy and the Administration may risk the attainment of these goals if it seeks a \$100 million AID supplemental for Vietnam.

The principal argument for an AID supplemental is DOD's opposition to providing additional support for Vietnam from the Defense budget.

However, OMB has proposed that the pressure on DOD be alleviated by raising OMB's \$71.8 billion ceiling, thus permitting DOD to fund the increase.

This seems to be the most sensible approach and is more likely to be acceptable to Secretary Laird than anything else short of the AID supplemental.

³ Nixon initialed his approval of option 2, which was Kissinger's recommendation.

Therefore, I recommend you approve an upward adjustment in DOD's ceiling to fund Option 2. OMB concurs.⁴

Approve (adjust DOD budget)

Disapprove (ask for AID supplemental)

NSDM

If you approve I will sign the NSDM at Tab A⁵ which establishes:

—a \$750 million U.S. foreign exchange assistance level for South Vietnam;

—that U.S. policy will be to obtain an effective exchange rate on GVN imports to permit open import licensing at the \$750 million level, i.e. the rate on non-essentials should be adjusted so as to permit open licensing on all imports within the \$750 million level, thereby eliminating windfall profits and precluding sharp increases in the prices of essential imports;

—these these policies will be funded by adding to OMB's current ceiling for DOD expenditures the amount required to bring U.S. expenditures in Vietnam to the \$750 million level in FY 71.

⁴ The President initialed his approval to "adjust DOD budget."

⁵ Attached; printed as Document 23.

18. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, August 10, 1970.

SUBJECT

Availability of Weapons and Ammunition for the Cambodian Armed Forces

In response to your request,² we have queried Mr. Fred Ladd in Phnom Penh as to his estimate of the availability of weapons and

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 510, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. IX. Secret. Sent for information. At the top of the memorandum, the President wrote, "Excellent report."

² In an August 4 memorandum to Kissinger, Haig recommended that he clear a backchannel message to Ladd requesting the assessment. (Ibid.)

ammunition for the Cambodian Armed Forces. Mr. Ladd has reported (Tab A)³ that the Cambodian Armed Forces presently have on hand a total of 270,500 rifles, carbines, and assault rifles. This includes weapons which we have given the Cambodians since March 18 and captured weapons from the sanctuaries. In addition, the arrival is projected of 23,000 M-1 rifles and 17,200 M-2 carbines, which when added to the present inventory will make a grand total of 310,700 weapons. (This figure does not include the 15,000 AK-47s from Indonesia, of which the Embassy is not yet aware.)

The Embassy points out that the Cambodians are planning to establish a first-line force level of 65,000 men in calendar 1970, and that 86,000 M-2 carbines, AK-47 type weapons, and M-16s will be available for these first-line troops. (Again, this does not include the AK-47s from Indonesia.) The remaining weapons in the inventory will go the secondary or provincial forces, with the most modern types going to priority units in these secondary forces. Spares will also be maintained for combat losses.

It had appeared earlier that ammunition supply for AK-47s might be a problem. Defense has now let a contract to produce 25 million AK-47 rounds in the U.S. at the Lake City Ordnance Plant, with production to begin in 90 days. This should take care of future needs. In addition, a contract has been let for 3 million rounds from foreign sources, and the Indonesian AK-47s are to be accompanied by 300 rounds per weapon. These actions, together with stocks on hand in Phnom Penh, should adequately meet Cambodian needs until the Lake City Ordnance Plant's production is available.

According to Ladd in Phnom Penh deliveries of equipment are being made to Cambodia in the quantities needed (Tab B).⁴ At the critical locations, weapons for individuals are not the primary problem. Rather, the problem now is developing the means of delivering supplies to the troops, since the Cambodian Forces simply do not have the means to deliver what they have on hand to all of the places that need help. Ladd observes, though, that troop morale is remarkably high, and that if the Cambodians are hanging on by a shoestring, it is a stronger shoestring than might be assumed.

³ Attached but not printed is message 233 from Ladd, August 7, in which he commented that he was handling the job well without a MAAG. The President wrote, "right," in the margin. Ladd also commented that "with the required kind of assistance (timely tactical air support for threatened garrisons, responsive post-attack logistical and medical evacuation assistance, and a reliable ammunition supply) the Cambodians are capable of keeping the enemy from achieving their objective." In the margin, the President wrote, "Good."

⁴ Attached, but not printed, is message 1886 from Phnom Penh, August 7.

19. National Security Decision Memorandum 78¹

Washington, August 11, 1970.

TO

The Vice President
The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
The Director, Central Intelligence Agency
The Director, Office of Emergency Preparedness
The Director, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency
The Director, Office of Science and Technology

SUBJECT

Authorization for Use of Riot Control Agents and Chemical Herbicides in War

After further review of the issues set forth in response to National Security Study Memorandum 59,² the President has considered United States policy on authorization for use by United States forces of riot control agents and chemical herbicides in war and has decided that:

1. The use of riot control agents by United States forces shall require Presidential approval except in cases of riot control and installation security on United States bases and posts.

2. The use of chemical herbicides by United States forces, either for defoliation or for anti-crop purposes, shall also require Presidential approval.

3. These decisions shall affect neither the current authority of United States forces in Vietnam to employ riot control agents nor the joint authority of COMUSMACV and the United States Ambassador, Saigon, to authorize support of Government of the Republic of Vietnam requests for herbicide operations. These requests will be handled in consonance with MACV Directive 525–1 (August 12, 1969), particularly Paragraph 5.

4. Any request for Presidential authorization shall be submitted by the Secretary of Defense and shall include the views of the Secretary of State. Each such request shall include (a) the specific agents to be used, (b) the specific theater of operations, (c) general categories of situations for use, and (d) justification for use.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 363, Subject Files, NSDMs 51–96. Secret. A copy was sent to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

² NSSM 59, “U.S. Policy on Chemical and Biological Warfare and Agents,” May 28, 1969, is published in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume E–2, Documents on Arms Control and Nonproliferation, 1969–1972, Document 141. The response to NSSM 59, October 30, 1969, is *ibid.*, Document 156.

5. Currently only Chlorobenzylidenemalononitrile (CS) and Chloracetophenone (CN) are classified and considered as riot control agents for military purposes. However, any agents which are accepted and used domestically for riot control and law enforcement purposes can be considered in this category in the implementation of this policy.

6. Chemical herbicides are considered as those chemical compounds which are used domestically within the United States in agriculture for weed control and similar purposes.

7. The annual review of United States chemical warfare and biological research programs, conducted by the Under Secretaries Committee as directed by National Security Decision Memorandum 35,³ will include a review of United States military riot control agent and chemical herbicide programs.

The President also has reaffirmed that his approval is required for the use of any lethal and incapacitating chemical weapons.

Henry A. Kissinger

³ NSDM 35, "United States Policy on Chemical Warfare Program and Bacteriological/Biological Research Program," issued on November 25, 1969, is *ibid.*, Document 165.

20. National Security Decision Memorandum 77¹

Washington, August 12, 1970.

TO

The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
The Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT

Air Activity in Southeast Asia Over FY 71

Following the VSSG review,² the President has directed that the Department of Defense shall:

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 363, Subject Files, NSDMs 51–96. Secret; Sensitive. A copy was sent to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

² See footnote 2, Document 13.

—Provide funding adequate to support an FY 1971 air activity level of 14,000 tactical air (USAF, USN and USMC), 1,000 B-52, and 1,000 gunship sorties monthly in Southeast Asia.

—Authorize a lower sorties level than funded—between 10,000 and 14,000 tactical air sorties flown monthly in Southeast Asia—depending upon circumstances as determined by COMUSMACV.

—Plan to compensate for this reduction in U.S. air activity by continuing DOD's intensive effort to enhance the capabilities of the VNAF to at least 4,300 sorties monthly and of the RLAf to 2,000 sorties monthly during FY 71.

—Plan to close two bases in South Vietnam (Chu Lai and Tuy Hoa) during FY 1971 and to place one base in Thailand (Takhli) on a caretaker basis until a further review.

Henry A. Kissinger

21. National Security Decision Memorandum 79¹

Washington, August 13, 1970.

TO

The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
The Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT

Establishment of Special Review Group for Southeast Asia

The President has directed the establishment of a Special Review Group for South East Asia comprising the Under Secretary of State, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Director of Central Intelligence, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and chaired by the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs.

The Special Review Group for South East Asia is responsible within the National Security Council framework for coordination of planning for the area and for the development of a comprehensive long-range political, military and economic policy document for the area.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Subject Files, Box 363, NSDMs 51–96. Secret; Sensitive. A copy was sent to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

In carrying out its responsibilities the Special Review Group will establish such interdepartmental working groups as may be required. Existing interdepartmental working groups, ad hoc groups and committees charged with specific responsibilities pertaining to the area may be called upon to assist the Special Review Group or may be consolidated or reconstituted as required by the Special Review Group. Studies being performed by such groups will be coordinated by the Special Review Group for South East Asia.

Henry A. Kissinger

22. Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, August 13, 1970, 11:05 a.m.–12:20 p.m.

SUBJECT

Southeast Asia

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	JCS
State	Adm. T.H. Moorer
U. Alexis Johnson	Lt. Gen. John Vogt
Marshall Green	NSC
Defense	Dr. Laurence Lynn
David Packard	Col. Richard Kennedy
Dennis Doolin	John H. Holdridge
CIA	Keith Guthrie
Lt. Gen. Robert Cushman	
Thomas H. Karamessines	
William W. Wells	

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. The WSAG was informed of the President's directive to have the Vietnam Special Studies Group prepare a study of long-term US strategy in Southeast Asia.² Responsibility for preparation of individ-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Top Secret; Nodis. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House.

² See Document 25 for the request to the Special Review Group for Southeast Asia (not the Vietnam Special Studies Group).

ual sections of the paper will be allocated among a group of inter-agency panels, and the overall effort will be coordinated by the VSSG Working Group. Detailed instructions on the scope of the study and the organizational procedures to be followed will be issued shortly. A first priority will be to define US strategy and objectives in Cambodia.

2. The Defense Department will investigate the possibility of paying Thai Khmer troops out of DOD funds which would be channeled through CIA.

3. The State Department will request Embassy Phnom Penh to provide an assessment of possible means to provide training to the Cambodian armed forces. The assessment should evaluate the feasibility of conducting training within Cambodia and should consider whether the Cambodian Government is likely to agree to continued training of its forces in South Vietnam.³ JCS will ask MACV to provide an evaluation of training programs being conducted in South Vietnam for the Cambodians. In preparing this evaluation, MACV should investigate alleged South Vietnamese abuses in connection with the training program.⁴ Col. Ladd of Embassy Phnom Penh should be asked to submit his views on possible means of utilizing Thai Khmer forces in Cambodia, including their relationship to the FANK and their deployment.⁵

4. JCS will transmit its proposed plan for expanding paramilitary operations in Southern Laos to Embassy Vientiane for Embassy comment.

5. The NSC staff will confirm with OMB that funds are available for training six Thai and two Lao special guerrilla units.

6. The WSAG agreed that a decision on the appropriate staffing level for the military assistance mission in Phnom Penh should be deferred until Ambassador Swank arrives in Phnom Penh and has an opportunity to submit recommendations.

7. The WSAG decided that funds to meet the immediate requirements for improving Radio Phnom Penh's transmitting facilities will

³ Telegram 131918 to Phnom Penh, August 13, conveyed the request. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 CAMB/KHMER)

⁴ Kennedy reported in an August 19 memorandum to Kissinger that JCS and MACV had completed the investigation and found that the allegations were unfounded. Kennedy further noted that the Cambodians were satisfied with and would continue training programs. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 510, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. IX)

⁵ In telegram 2262 from Phnom Penh, September 3, the Embassy reported that the Cambodians did not want Thai Khmer troops except in an emergency and were concerned that the U.S. Government might force troops on Cambodia because it had committed substantial funds for training and supplying. (Ibid., Box 511, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. X)

be provided from AID contingency funds. On longer term improvement, the NSC Ad Hoc Psyops Committee will submit recommendations for consideration at the next WSAG meeting.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

23. National Security Decision Memorandum 80¹

Washington, August 13, 1970.

TO

The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
The Director, Office of Management and Budget
The Administrator of the Agency for International Development

SUBJECT

Vietnam Economic Policy

The President has made the following decisions on U.S. economic policy for South Vietnam for FY 71 and beyond.²

The level of U.S. foreign exchange support for Vietnam in FY 71 will be \$750 million. This support will be provided so as to obtain an effective exchange rate on GVN imports that permits open import licensing at the \$750 million level, i.e., the rate on non-essentials should be adjusted in order to permit open licensing on imports, thereby eliminating windfall profits and minimizing increases in the prices of essential imports.

The \$750 million level will be the ceiling for U.S. assistance to Vietnam for FY 71 and beyond. It is expected that as domestic production rises and GVN exports increase, U.S. assistance will decline so as to maintain the current level of consumption.

On the basis of current budget projections (see the attached table), \$740 million import funding will be available. The Department of De-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 363, Subject Files, NSDMs 51–96. Secret; Exdis. Copies were sent to the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Chairman of the JCS, and the Director of Central Intelligence.

² See Document 17.

fense will provide the additional \$10 million to meet the \$750 level and the Department of Defense expenditure ceiling will be increased by the same amount. Likewise if other adjustments result in further shortfalls these will be compensated by similar increases in Department of Defense expenditures and adjustment in the Department of Defense expenditure ceiling.

Note that MACV AIK expenditures will be reduced by fifty percent in order to minimize the inflationary impact of U.S. piaster expenditures for which the GVN receives no dollar compensation.

The Department of Defense should explore ways to increase on-shore procurement of items now purchased outside Vietnam as a means of increasing its dollar expenditures in South Vietnam and promoting economic development.

The U.S. will employ the assistance provided in accordance with the above guidelines to support and encourage GVN economic policies that accomplish the following:

- promote economic growth and exports,
- increase real domestic tax revenues by at least 10% per year,
- insure that the sales of U.S. imported rice are conducted so as to:
 - stabilize but not depress internal rice prices and encourage increased rice production,
 - move South Vietnam to self-sufficiency in rice at world market prices as soon as practicable,
 - rationalize official sales of rice to minimize the gap between official and free market rice prices and to eliminate the corruption attendant to the present system.
- insure that the GVN institutes a realistic accommodation rate,
- encourage the GVN to maintain reserves at \$200 million or less.

None of the foregoing policies should be pursued in a manner that would jeopardize the goals of Vietnamization or the fundamental objective of U.S. policy that the political forces within South Vietnam should determine its future. In particular, major or precipitous declines in the incomes of large income groups should be avoided, although slight declines are expected, particularly for farmers whose incomes have been greatly increased by recent price changes or urban workers who have profited from war-time economic conditions.

To provide on-going review of the foregoing policies and the economic situation in South Vietnam the President has directed that the VSSG:

- monitor and report as appropriate on major economic developments in South Vietnam,

—consider the adequacy of GVN civilian and military wages and the proposed GVN wage increase and possible implications of GVN wage policy for U.S. objectives,

—develop a plan for funding in FY 72 the level of U.S. assistance required pursuant to the preceding policy.

Henry A. Kissinger

Attachment

FY 1971 Sources of Commercial Import Financing (\$ US Millions)

CIP	300
PL-480	135
U.S. Piaster Purchases	<u>305</u>
	740

Derivation of U.S. Piaster Purchases

Expenditures

DOD Regular	260
DOD Other ³	50
Civil Official	50
Personal Purchases	<u>40</u>
	400

Sources of Piasters

AIK	20
Trust Fund	40
PL-480	25
Other	<u>10</u>
	95

Net U.S. Piaster Purchases \$305

³ Based on \$15 million for Special Forces, \$35 million for RDC. [Footnote in the original.]

24. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, August 17, 1970.

SUBJECT

Clandestine Psychological Campaign on Cambodia

Mr. Helms has reported (Tab A)² a gradual evolution in the CIA clandestine program directed toward Cambodia:

—from support of the GOC, it has gradually shifted to support for the concept of an independent Cambodian Government, and it has somewhat diminished the original emphasis upon Cambodian neutrality.

—it has shifted emphasis to show the dilemma which the USSR faces in Indochina.

—with the U.S. withdrawal, it has shifted from support of allied intervention to focus on Saigon's military successes and diplomatic initiatives.

—it has emphasized the Djakarta Conference³ and Asian solutions to Asian problems.

—it has gradually enlarged the theme of North Vietnamese aggression in Cambodia to point to aggression throughout Indochina, and has pointed to Hanoi's logistic problems in attempting to fight a three-front war.

—it is adjusting to the gradual diminution of world interest in Cambodia.⁴

Mr. Helms reports that the present preoccupation is the September non-aligned conference in Lusaka and the problem of Cambodian representation. Agents and assets are being deployed to work for a favorable outcome in Lusaka.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 588, Cambodia Operation 1970, Cambodia–Clandestine Psychological Campaign on Cambodia. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. Kissinger initialed his comment, "Communicate to Helms." In a September 2 memorandum to Helms, Kissinger noted that the President commented favorably on the campaign and urged him to continue it. (Ibid.)

² A memorandum from Helms to Kissinger, July 27, is attached but not printed.

³ Reference is to a conference on Cambodia held by the Foreign Ministers of 11 Asian nations in Jakarta, Indonesia, May 16–17, 1970. Following the conference, the Foreign Ministers issued a communiqué urging an immediate end to all acts of hostility in Cambodia and withdrawal of all foreign forces. The text of the May 18 U.S. statement supporting the communiqué is in the Department of State *Bulletin*, June 8, 1970, pp. 710–711.

⁴ The President wrote in the margin next to these points, "Good, keep it up."

Mr. Helms has transmitted 234 new clippings, bringing to 1,125 the number of news articles, editorials, radio and TV broadcasts which have been placed by CIA throughout the world in support of its program on Cambodia.

CIA is continuing to place intelligence items on Cambodia with selected influential persons abroad, and the success of the program has led to plans to expand the program to embrace all of Indochina.

As the above points suggest, CIA is in the process of adjusting the Cambodian campaign to pick up the old issues on Vietnam plus new issues developing in the area, without causing any break in the momentum of the campaign which began exclusively focussed upon Cambodia.

25. National Security Study Memorandum 99¹

Washington, August 17, 1970.

TO

The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
The Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT

U.S. Strategy for Southeast Asia

The President has directed that a complete review and analysis of U.S. strategy alternatives for Southeast Asia for the period 1970-1975 be undertaken. The study should devise U.S. strategy alternatives consistent with:

- alternative statements of U.S. interests,
- assessments of the enemy's interests and goals,
- an analysis of enemy capabilities,
- an analysis of the interests and capabilities of the non-communist nations of Southeast Asia, including the prospects for increased regional cooperation,

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 365, Subject Files, NSSMs 43–103. Top Secret. Copies were sent to the Chairman of the JCS, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, and the Administrator of the Agency for International Development.

—an analysis of the potential for U.S. military and economic assistance and assistance from other non-communist nations, and

—an analysis of possible roles for U.S. forces in Southeast Asia.

Each strategy should be accompanied by an appraisal of its cost and political consequences.

The study will be carried out under the direction of the Special Review Group for Southeast Asia and will be organized as follows:

—Interests Panel

—Diplomatic Options Panel

—Military Strategy Options Panel

—Economic and Military Assistance Panel

Membership of each panel shall comprise representatives of the Departments of State and Defense, Central Intelligence Agency, Joint Chiefs of Staff and the National Security Council Staff. The Economic and Military Assistance Panel shall include also representatives of the Office of Management and Budget and the Agency for International Development.

The Working Group presently constituted to support the Vietnam Special Studies Group also will support the Special Review Group for Southeast Asia in the conduct of this study, and will prepare a detailed study plan and supervise and coordinate the work of the panels. In the conduct of the study the panels will consider and utilize as appropriate the studies prepared in response to NSSM's 51, 94 and 95,² previous Vietnam Special Studies Group papers and relevant National Intelligence Estimates.

As an initial interim step in the overall study alternative short-range military strategies for Cambodia should be developed. This paper should be submitted to the Chairman, Special Review Group for Southeast Asia not later than September 4, 1970.

The completed study should be submitted to the Chairman, Special Review Group for Southeast Asia by September 30, 1970.

Henry A. Kissinger

² NSSM 51, "Program Analysis of Thailand," issued on April 26, 1969, and the response to NSSM 51, August 5, 1970, are in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XX, Southeast Asia, 1969–1972, Documents 10 and 82. NSSM 94, "Diplomatic Initiatives on Indo-China," issued on May 25, and NSSM 95, "U.S. Policy Objectives in Indo-China," issued on June 6, are *ibid.*, volume VI, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Documents 305 and 319. Regarding the response to NSSM 94, see *ibid.*, Document 324. The response to NSSM 95, June 24, is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 365, Subject Files, NSSMs 43–103.

26. Letter from President Nixon to Cambodian Prime Minister Lon Nol¹

Washington, August 20, 1970.

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

It was with the greatest pleasure that I read your letter of July 21,² with its assessment of the dynamic forces your country can bring to bear against the Communist aggression to which it has been subjected. The strong and effective defense already presented by the Cambodian armed forces against this aggression and in support of Cambodia's independence, neutrality, and territorial integrity, has inspired my own admiration and that of the American people. The fact that United States assistance has played some part in this defense is a source of deep personal satisfaction to me.

You have my assurances that the United States intends to continue to provide support for your country in its brave and determined struggle. On the military side, we will maintain our air interdiction activities. These, I am sure, will also continue to be of value to your own armed forces. We are now looking into means by which we may help to meet the other needs you have outlined, including your request for helicopters.³ In addition to the military assistance delivered during our fiscal year ending June 30, 1970, I have authorized an initial level of \$40 million for such assistance during the current fiscal year. Our representatives in Phnom Penh will work closely with you in determining the priority needs to be met.

In the economic field, we are considering what economic assistance the United States may be able to offer, either acting individually or in concert with other friendly countries and international organizations, to relieve the strain of war on the Cambodian economy. I look

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 749, Presidential Correspondence, 1969–1974, Cambodia, Prime Minister, Lon Nol, 1970. No classification marking. Kissinger forwarded the letter to the President under an August 19 covering memorandum. The text of the letter was sent in telegram 133014 to Phnom Penh, August 15. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 15–1 US/NIXON)

² See Document 6.

³ In memorandum CM–178–70, August 25, Moorer informed Laird that he had worked out a plan with McCain and Abrams, which provided for helicopters to be operated and maintained by the VNAF but located in Phnom Penh where they would bear Cambodian Air Force markings and be used in support of the FANK until Cambodian pilots could be trained to fly them. Moorer added that the Department of Defense Office of General Counsel had approved the plan. (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–76–76, Box 7, Cambodia 452)

forward to further discussions between our governments and with the International Monetary Fund on these requirements.

I can assure you, too, that we shall make available to you our experience in organization of the countryside and local security arrangements through visits by our experts who will hold discussions with yours, through training of Cambodians in other countries, and through encouraging third countries to provide experts in these fields.

As an indication of my continuing deep interest in Cambodia's concerns, I have asked Vice President Agnew to visit Phnom Penh on August 28 for conversations with you and your associates. I hope that you will take the opportunity presented by the Vice President's visit to speak with him fully and frankly on the problems which you are facing and on the assistance which you believe the United States may be able to render.⁴

Let me again convey to your Excellency my country's friendship and sympathy for the people of Cambodia in their struggle. I am confident that the Cambodian sense of nationalism and liberty which you so eloquently described will prevail.⁵

Sincerely yours,

Richard Nixon

⁴ Agnew met with Lon Nol on August 28. A report of the meeting is in CINCPAC message 301920Z, August 31, which indicates that the two discussed a plan for \$1.5 million in either MAP or AID funds, and Lon Nol expressed his gratitude. (Ibid., VP's SEA Trip 8/70 Pt. 2)

⁵ Lon Nol responded in an August 27 letter and declared the United States was "playing with distinction, its important, traditional international role as the defender of small States that are unjustly treated." Eliot forwarded a translation to Kissinger, September 26. (Ibid., Box 749, Presidential Correspondence, 1969–1974, Cambodia, Prime Minister, Lon Nol (1970))

27. **Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon**¹

Washington, August 22, 1970.

SUBJECT

Communist Congress in South Vietnam and Reports on Hanoi Strategy

Recent defector reports about the second congress of the Communist Party of South Vietnam, held in September 1969, reflect Hanoi's concern about Communist prospects and interest in a cease-fire before U.S. withdrawal and installation of a coalition. Though the congress was held almost a year ago, some of the material emerging from it is still pertinent today.

Problems Discussed. Several leaders of Hanoi's effort in South Vietnam cited the following problems to the congress:

—The Communist political and military structure had suffered great losses.

—There had been a decline in the morale and quality of Communist party cadres.

—The Allied programs which created the greatest troubles for the Communists were the accelerated pacification program, the Phoenix program, and the Chieu Hoi (defector) program.²

Possible Countermeasures Discussed. Several countermeasures were emphasized:

—To recruit new Communist party members very fast.

—To infiltrate party members into the GVN apparatus.

—To break up large Communist units into smaller units.

—From the middle to the end of 1970, the "general offensive" must be implemented.

General Options. According to the leading statements at the congress, Hanoi envisaged two possible outcomes to the struggle:

(1) A Communist defeat of various GVN programs, leading to a *cease-fire*. The earlier the GVN programs could be defeated, the earlier the cease-fire could come into being.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 148, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam 1 Aug 70. Secret. Sent for information. Holdridge forwarded the memorandum to Kissinger under an August 19 covering memorandum. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² The Phoenix Program was a joint U.S. and Vietnamese government intelligence program, which aimed at identifying and locating the Viet Cong infrastructure in the villages and capturing its membership, particularly the leadership, to gather intelligence information. The Chieu Hoi program, directed byCORDS, sought to convince Communists in South Vietnam to defect.

(2) If this could not be achieved, the result would be *a more prolonged struggle*. The delegates attending the congress did not even want to consider this situation.

Cease-Fire Conditions. The conditions which the Communists anticipated for the cease-fire included the continued existence of the GVN and the presence of U.S. forces in Vietnam at the start of the cease-fire. During the cease-fire the Communist cadres would attempt to infiltrate the cities and would attempt to foment uprisings against the GVN. Moreover, after the withdrawal of U.S. forces, the Communist forces then anticipated turning on the South Vietnamese forces and defeating them completely. At some unspecified point, after U.S. withdrawal, the coalition government with Communist control of key positions would be imposed.³

The sequence thus envisaged was (1) cease-fire, (2) U.S. withdrawal, and (3) a coalition government.

Further Recent Appraisals: A more recent report by a defector who had been briefed on Hanoi Politburo attitudes by a leading Communist cadre in Saigon confirmed many of the above appraisals but reflected some changes in tactics. The following appraisals were given to him as reflecting the view of the Hanoi Politburo:

—1969 was the worst year of the war for the Communists.

—The immediate effects of Cambodian developments have been very detrimental, although the situation there will have long-range benefits for the revolution in South Vietnam and Cambodia.

—Fighting on three fronts is a great drain on the resources of North Vietnam.

—Viet Cong finances and rear services have been cut to the bone.

—But the situation in Saigon was considered to be basically favorable to the revolution because of demonstrations and opposition against the GVN.

—Vietnamization gives hope because it means that the power of the allies will be reduced and that the GVN will face great military and economic problems.

Recent Tactical Changes. According to the same defector, Communist plans for future ways to end the war were very closely held and only a few top cadre were briefed. He said, however, that plans were

³ The President highlighted this paragraph and wrote in the margin, "Their likely game plan—in any event." Kissinger also sent the President another memorandum on August 22 in which he summarized a collection of reports from Kien Hoa Province in the South Vietnam delta. Kissinger noted that these reports suggested that Hanoi was preparing for "protracted guerrilla warfare." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 148, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam 1 Aug 1970)

to be completed by 1970 so that operations could start at the beginning of 1971. (This schedule shows considerable slippage from the earlier expectation that the “general offensive” was to be implemented from the middle to the end of 1970.)

The recent plans also place a great deal of emphasis on the attainment of a new GVN—without Thieu and Ky—as an intermediate objective, rather than on the immediate attainment of a coalition government. The Communists would hope that the new GVN would be less effective on the ground and would be more ready to compromise in Paris. They described several ways in which they then hoped to move from the creation of a new GVN to the ultimate formation of a coalition.

Comment: Although there have been changes in Communist plans and timetables since the 1969 Congress, it is still noteworthy that at that time they were seriously contemplating a cease-fire before U.S. withdrawal and before a coalition, but that they planned to violate it after we had pulled out.

It is also noteworthy that there has been some slippage in Hanoi’s timetable since then.

28. Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, August 24, 1970.

SUBJECT

The Recent Flare-Up Between President Thieu and Vice President Ky

We do not believe that the recent public exchange between South Vietnamese President Thieu and Vice President Ky has led to the “irreparable” break suggested in a recent intelligence analysis, but it is clear that the tension between them is much higher than before.²

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 148, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam 1 Aug 70. Top Secret. Sent for information. Holdridge forwarded this memorandum to Kissinger under an August 17 covering memorandum, recommending that he sign it. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, “The President has seen.”

² According to an August 11 memorandum from Haig to Smyser, the President requested an analysis of CIA’s assessment on a break between Thieu and Ky. (Ibid.)

Background

The relationship between these two men has always been tense and uncertain, for the following reasons:

—They are completely different in their personal and political styles and habits. Ky is flamboyant, gregarious, out-spoken, and direct. Thieu is cautious, circumspect, somewhat devious, and generally careful with what he says.

—The only characteristic they share is that they are both ambitious, unfortunately for the same job.

—They also hold different political views. Ky is more ready to attack North Vietnam and to send South Vietnamese forces outside the country. Thieu appears genuinely to believe that the most important arena of struggle is South Vietnam itself. Ky appears quite ready to attack some elements in the generally conservative South Vietnamese power structure, at least verbally. Thieu believes that social development must be brought about gradually and with all parties aboard. He is not a revolutionary in any sense.

—The history of their relationship is one of ups and downs. Ky was for many years Thieu's inferior in rank and reputation. He surged forward when his Air Force helped quell a Saigon coup attempt in late 1964 and when he became South Vietnamese Premier a year later. But in 1967 Thieu out-maneuvered Ky for the military presidential candidacy and he has been on top ever since. However, Ky still has enough support among the military to make him a constant threat to Thieu.

The Flare-Up

The recent exchange probably resulted from Ky's feeling that Thieu had made a fool of him on Cambodia. After Sihanouk was overthrown Ky assumed charge of GVN policy toward Cambodia. He rushed into this task with excess energy and little sense for Southeast Asian or world political realities. He made it appear that South Vietnam was ready to assume full responsibility for the defense of Cambodia and that Saigon wanted an Indochinese military pact. Thieu undercut him by setting the record straight and relieving him of the Cambodian problem. Ky, who is very proud and sensitive, probably saw this as a real slap in the face.

On July 20, speaking to I Corps officers, Ky's frustrations exploded in a number of criticisms of Thieu's leadership. Ky said that Thieu's advisers were corrupt, incompetent, or both. He also said that Thieu had failed to take his (Ky's) advice on some key issues and thus had failed to solve some problems. This was the first time that Ky had spoken so openly against Thieu.

Three days later, speaking to Vietnamese newsmen, Thieu replied in kind. He said that he and Ky had been on the same ticket because

of a “forced marriage.” To ease the sting, however, he said that Ky’s remarks must have been misreported.³

Since that time both men have restrained themselves. This has probably lowered the tension and has, as usual, left Thieu with the last word.

Prospects

The personal and political tension between the two men runs sufficiently high that the danger of a rift is always present. It is particularly possible that they will come to a major parting of the ways next summer, when presidential candidates must again be chosen. There are reports that Ky will not run again with Thieu, and may even run against him. But the odds are that in the foreseeable future they will continue their cooperation, uneasy as it is, for the following reasons:

—The South Vietnamese army does not want an open rift between them. The circle of military officers who rule South Vietnam will probably exert great pressure on the two to compose their differences.

—Ky knows that he cannot win an open power challenge.

—Confrontation is not in Thieu’s style. He prefers to operate by indirection.

—Although Thieu is superior in rank and strength he also needs Ky if he is to maintain internal stability. He is prepared to tolerate some of Ky’s peccadillos to keep him in the fold.⁴

³ The Embassy reported these incidents in telegram 11967 from Saigon, July 26, which Smyser forwarded to Kissinger under cover of a July 29 memorandum. (Ibid.)

⁴ Dean sent a memorandum to Haldeman and Kissinger on September 23, noting that Ky intended to visit the United States and attend a high-profile, pro-GVN rally in October. He warned that Ky had become a lightning rod for anti-war activists because of his openly hawkish positions. (Ibid., Box 149, Viet 1 Sept 70) In a September 25 memorandum to Dean, Kissinger responded and explained that Bui Diem, Bunker, and Billy Graham had all attempted to dissuade Ky and that he planned on meeting with Ky in Paris on October 2. (Ibid.)

29. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, August 27, 1970.

SUBJECT

Southeast Asia Redeployment

Attached at Tab A is a memorandum from Secretary Laird on Southeast Asia redeployments in which he describes his actions to stay within FY 71 budget levels by planning for accelerated troop withdrawals from South Vietnam. This memorandum has possible serious implications which I wish to bring to your attention.²

Secretary Laird points out that your decision to reduce our forces in Vietnam by 50,000 by October 15 will not bring our authorized manning down to the budget request levels for FY 71. The announced troop ceiling for that date is 384,000, some 17,000 troops higher than the level assumed in the budget.

Secretary Laird goes on to point out that the Office of Management and Budget has asked the Defense Department to make every effort to reduce Defense outlays \$1.2 billion below the FY 71 budget request. Faced with the dual prospect of the budget request providing funds for lower force levels than those now in prospect and pressures to further reduce outlays, Secretary Laird asked MACV, CINCPAC and the JCS to "recommend" to him troop ceilings and a redeployment program to meet your approved May 1, 1971 troop ceiling of 284,000. The JCS "recommendations" would entail withdrawing 90,000 of the announced 150,000 troops by the end of this year and the remaining 60,000

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS-2, Chronological File, August 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. Lord drafted the memorandum on August 25. Printed from a copy with an indication that Kissinger signed the original.

² Attached but not printed is an August 20 memorandum from Laird to Kissinger. On September 4, Kissinger replied to Laird about Southeast Asia redeployments: "At the time that the President approved the 150,000 reduction figure, it was anticipated that no more than an additional 10,000 troops would be withdrawn from South Vietnam before December 31, 1970. While the President agrees with your position that there be no supplemental budget requests in FY 1971 for U.S. forces in Southeast Asia, he would like to know your estimates of the additional dollar costs and manpower requirements that would have to be met if we were to hold to the original schedule. He would also like to receive the views of the JCS on that original schedule." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-215, NSDM Files, NSDM 52) In a September 10 meeting with his Vietnam advisers, Laird commented that all of the requests were answered in his August 20 memorandum and that he saw no reason to go back to the JCS. (Memorandum for the record by Odeen, September 10; Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330-76-67, Box 88, Viet 092, Sep-Dec 1970)

by next May, which is precisely the opposite of what you had in mind. Secretary Laird concludes that he has informed the JCS, CINCPAC and MACV that their “recommended troop ceiling and redeployment plan through May 1, 1971 is approved for planning.”

You should be aware of the fact that when Secretary Laird says that the military has “recommended” these troop ceilings, they are in reality making their proposals within the strict fiscal guidance laid down by the Secretary and thus presenting what they consider the least bad of their choices available within this constructed framework. It is therefore misleading to state simply that the JCS “recommend” the troop ceilings contained in Secretary Laird’s memorandum.

In addition, though not mentioned in his memorandum, Secretary Laird has established lower draft quotas which might well deprive the Army of the ability to provide the force levels necessary to meet the goals we were considering even if there were sufficient funds.

In response to Secretary Laird’s memorandum I have done the following:

- confirmed informally that we will reach the target date of October 15 within one or two percent of the 50,000 reduction figure you announced;

- told Admiral Moorer that you are *not* committed to the troop levels that Secretary Laird has approved for planning purposes;

- sent a memorandum to Secretary Laird asking him, the JCS, CINCPAC, and MACV for their assessment of the risks associated with the troop reductions outlined by the Secretary. This should surface any objections from the military who we understand consider the risks to be “imprudent.”

Further Background and Implications of Secretary Laird’s Memorandum

Secretary Laird’s memorandum points up that further unilateral withdrawals are contemplated without considering whether they might be used to extract political benefit in the negotiations.

As you know, your decision to reduce U.S. forces in South Vietnam by 150,000 through the Spring of 1971 was bound by two central considerations:

- to maintain the momentum of U.S. peace initiatives by forthright public announcement;

- to provide maximum flexibility in the rate of drawdown between the present and the critical period of the 1971 Tet.

Within the framework of our overall objectives was the need for continued progress in Vietnamization and minimum exposure of remaining U.S. forces to undue risks. The capability of ARVN forces to assume greater responsibility for their own security was fundamental to the timing of our plan. We agreed with General Abrams’ recommendation that no more than 50,000 troops be withdrawn from Vietnam this year. The reasons for this recommendation were:

—a strategy of using our residual strength to discourage a new Tet offensive in late January or February of 1971.

—to enable us to apply maximum bargaining leverage with the remaining substantial increment of combat forces.

The security situation in South Vietnam has improved as a result of the Cambodian operation. Nevertheless, I and II Corps are still threatened and ARVN force postures in III and IV Corps have been weakened by the redeployment of ARVN forces to Cambodia.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the field commanders have reconsidered these factors in a new assessment of their earlier withdrawal plans. They have concluded that an accelerated rate of redeployment will impose imprudent risks to Vietnamization and U.S. objectives in South Vietnam. On the other hand, the way the Secretary of Defense has set up the budget and organized draft calls has made it infeasible for them to adhere to their previous recommendation that we withdraw 60,000 spaces by December 31, 1970, to be followed by another slice of 90,000 through April 30, 1971. Even if sufficient funds could be made available, the past level of draft calls now makes it impossible to achieve the broad manpower base necessary for the force level in Southeast Asia which the Chiefs would support.

Faced with the foregoing, the Chiefs developed the alternative plan mentioned in the Secretary's memo, which involves the withdrawal of 90,000 by the end of the year, with an additional drawdown of 60,000 by April 30. The net effect would be a compressed, straight-line reduction of 120,000 spaces by the end of February—an increase of approximately 60,000 beyond what the military consider a prudent course of action. As Secretary Laird mentioned to you during your meeting with General Westmoreland on August 17, one of the most serious difficulties associated with this expedited withdrawal schedule is the personnel turbulence that it will entail. The rapid drawdown of 90,000 U.S. forces between now and January 1, 1971 will result in personnel turbulence within many of our remaining combat units and tend to dampen maximum pressure on the enemy during this critical period.

In my view, our biggest bargaining chip between now and the end of Tet (February 1971) is our ability to regulate the timing of the drawdown of our forces. We face the danger of losing this chip. Thus, whether the potential military risk materializes or not, you should be aware that fiscal constraints and, more importantly, manpower decisions made outside the framework of the NSC system threaten to deprive us of desirable flexibility in the critical months ahead. The proposed accelerated redeployments would in effect spend all the benefits of the Cambodian operation on our withdrawal schedule rather than using these benefits as possible leverage in achieving a negotiated peace.

30. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, September 1, 1970.

SUBJECT

The Current Military Situation in Cambodia

In response to your request of August 25, 1970 for an urgent assessment of the military situation in Cambodia, I tasked the JCS, the CIA and Mr. Ladd at our Embassy in Phnom Penh for their estimates of the situation. The JCS response includes a CINCPAC assessment. All are agreed that the Cambodian Government is in no danger of being toppled by Communist military attack. They do not believe the enemy intends to launch a major military attack on Phnom Penh in the near future. In sum, they believe the military situation in Cambodia to be no worse, and perhaps somewhat better, than at any time in the past few months. Mr. Ladd states that the military situation is better for the Cambodians today than it has been since he has been there. The JCS memorandum is at Tab A; CIA's is at Tab B and Mr. Ladd's views are at Tab C.²

The Overall Military Situation

The JCS and CIA note that the Communists' main immediate objectives are to re-establish a secure LOC system in Cambodia, to re-establish border bases for sustaining the struggle in South Vietnam and to develop a Khmer-based insurgency. They both agree that at least through the rest of the rainy season, which ends in October–November, the Communists will probably try to keep FANK forces tied down in defending key population centers in an effort to maintain their own relative freedom of movement in rural areas. The JCS note that FANK does not have the capability to conduct sustained offensive operations but that it does have a limited defensive capability to defend key population centers and lines of communication. CIA and the JCS,

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 511, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. X. Top Secret; Sensitive. The President wrote at the top of the memorandum: "Haig—Keep on top of this—It has highest priority." According to a handwritten note on another copy of the memorandum, Kennedy took the memorandum and its attachments to San Clemente. (Ibid.)

² Tab A, memorandum JCSM 420–70 from Moorer to Laird, August 27, is attached but not printed. Tab B was not attached. Tab C, a retyped message from Ladd to Haig, August 27, was not attached. A copy is attached to message WH1525 from Kennedy to Lord, August 28. (Ibid.)

however, stress the importance of allied military support, particularly cross-border operations and tactical air strikes, to this FANK capability.

It is CIA's view that the Cambodians are holding their own in most populated areas of the country and that the situation is not likely to change greatly in the near future. The JCS and CIA are agreed that the Communists are practicing a protracted war strategy in Cambodia. They believe the enemy hopes to wear down the Cambodian army and government over a long period of time during which they intend to develop a Communist infrastructure to control the population. They do not believe the Communists can or intend to destroy the Lon Nol Government by direct military attacks in the near future.

The Situation Around Phnom Penh

Neither the JCS, Mr. Ladd nor the CIA believe a major enemy ground attack on Phnom Penh is likely in the next few months. All three, however, note the possibility that the Communists could harass Phnom Penh without warning with small scale ground probes and mortar or rocket attacks. They agree that one of the enemy's major aims is to isolate Phnom Penh both to facilitate Communist control over the countryside and to intensify pressure on the government.

The Cambodian Government's LOC's

Mr. Ladd estimates that if the enemy chooses to use his forces in sufficient strength, he can probably block any of the LOC's for two to six days. He notes, however, that FANK or FANK/ARVN would be able to reopen them. The JCS state that it is clear that the enemy is willing to spread his forces thin in order to maintain pressure on provincial capitals and key route junctions. The enemy, however, does not appear to have sufficient assets to enable him to keep key LOC's closed.

Enemy and FANK Military Strength

There is general agreement that the enemy combat force in Cambodia and along the border totals approximately 24,000 men, with an additional 25,000–30,000 administrative service troops. There are an additional 7,000 to 10,000 Cambodian dissidents. Arrayed against this enemy force, FANK has a main force of better than 110,000 personnel, up from 35,000 in March 1970. The Cambodian Air Force has 80 qualified pilots and 25 more in pilot training status. FANK has shown improvement in several areas, according to CINCPAC, and still further improvement is anticipated as the combination of combat experience, improved communications and logistics and the infusion of newly trained troops take effect.

31. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, September 1, 1970.

SUBJECT

My September 7 Meeting with the North Vietnamese

As you know, the North Vietnamese have agreed to meet with me in Paris on September 7 at 9:30 a.m. Both sides will be feeling out one another's positions after the long interval since our last, pre-Cambodia meeting on April 4.² With Le Duc Tho absent, I do not expect Xuan Thuy to show a great deal of flexibility; we can count on his sticking closely to his instructions with characteristic discipline.

I plan to speak first at this meeting since they spoke first at the last one. Attached for your approval is a draft opening statement (Tab A).³ I would reiterate our preference for a negotiated settlement, but would underline that the time for this is beginning to run out and at some point we will be committed to our alternative course of Vietnamization.

The major points in my opening statement are as follows:

—Ambassador Bruce, whose appointment we consider a significant step, has your full confidence and is fully empowered to negotiate on all issues. He alone on our delegation will be kept fully informed of my meetings and may join future sessions.⁴

—You continue to seek a peace fair to both sides and your seriousness is underlined by your sending me on these missions.

—The other side must soon choose the way they wish to resolve the conflict. We are nearing the time when the chances for a negotiated

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 853, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol V. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for action. The President wrote, "OK," at the top of the memorandum.

² For a record of this meeting, see *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume VI, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Document 222.

³ Tab A was not attached, but drafts of Kissinger's opening statement are in National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 853, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol V.

⁴ In an August 19 memorandum to Kissinger, Smyser recommended keeping Bruce informed about the secret negotiations with the North Vietnamese. While Smyser cautioned that doing this would increase the risk of leaks and create more logistical problems for Kissinger's staff, he believed that "on balance, I think we should cut him in. Curiously, I think that the whole arrangement will appeal to Hanoi's passion for complex and devious maneuvering." (*Ibid.*, Box 861, Camp David, Memos, 1969–1970)

settlement will pass, and they will have committed themselves to a test of arms against a strengthened South Vietnam, supported by us in whatever way seems appropriate and necessary.

—We envisage that these restricted meetings should deal with the general principles of a settlement which should then be translated into detailed agreements in private and plenary sessions between Bruce and Xuan Thuy.

—We find unacceptable two elements of their negotiating approach, i.e., setting forth preconditions and coupling military pressure with negotiations. On the latter point, I would repeat our warning about the possible unfortunate consequences of military pressures and would caution them particularly against military actions such as the shelling in South Vietnam which is inconsistent with our understanding of the bombing halt.

—I would present a schedule for withdrawal of U.S. forces over a 12-month period to replace the 16-month timetable I gave them in March. (This schedule has been cleared through the bureaucracy; we have made a couple of minor changes to bring it into accord with our public statements and previous positions.) I would ask them for their response and for them to tell us with whom they would discuss the question of their forces in the south.

—On political issues, I would seek their reaction to our proposals at the last meeting which they said needed further study. I would repeat the principles in your April 20 speech⁵ and reiterate that we cannot agree to the replacement in advance of the leaders of the present South Vietnamese Government.

—I would close with an exhortation to speak candidly and go directly to the heart of these problems.

Recommendations:

That you approve this approach by initialing the statement attached at Tab A.⁶

⁵ In an address to the Nation on April 20, Nixon announced that, despite the lack of progress toward a negotiated settlement, he was withdrawing 150,000 troops by the spring of 1971. He set out three principles for a political settlement: the Vietnamese people must be free to determine their own future, the settlement must reflect the “existing relationship of political forces within South Vietnam,” and all sides must agree to abide by the results of the political process. He again refused to agree to the North Vietnamese demand that the current South Vietnamese Government be overthrown. The text of the statement is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pp. 373–377.

⁶ Nixon did not initial Kissinger’s draft statement. However, he did deliver his opening statement, with some modification, as drafted. See footnote 3 above.

32. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, September 3, 1970.

SUBJECT

Your meeting with Ambassador Emory C. Swank, Ambassador to Cambodia, on Friday, September 4

Purpose of the Meeting

Ambassador Swank has been confirmed by the Senate and is on his way to assume his post in Phnom Penh. Your meeting with Mr. Swank will be an opportunity to give him a clear impression of your policy toward Cambodia. A firm statement by you will arm him for his difficult task and help him to overcome the attitude of reticence which has characterized our Embassy in Phnom Penh under Chargé Rives up to now.²

Background

Although Ambassador Swank has never visited Cambodia, he served as DCM in adjoining Laos from 1964–67 and is familiar with regional problems. Since his designation some six weeks ago he has had the opportunity to read in comprehensively on current Cambodian problems and US policy positions, consult with the appropriate US officials in Washington, and to discuss Cambodian sentiments and problems with the resident Cambodian Ambassador and those few Cambodian officials who have visited Washington. Biographic information is at Tab A.³

Talking Points

You may wish to make the following points:

—You do not want to see a communist government in Cambodia and want to do everything we can to prevent this.

—Lon Nol should be given no reason to question the firmness of your intent to support Cambodia in its effort to protect its neutrality.

—You are going to continue to seek maximum possible help for Cambodia from its Asian neighbors.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 82, Memoranda for the President, Beginning August 30, 1970. Secret.

² According to the President's Daily Diary, Nixon, Kissinger, and Swank met at San Clemente from 10:16 to 10:50 a.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files) No further record of the meeting was found.

³ Attached but not printed.

—The flow of US military aid and economic assistance will continue; our air interdiction program will be broadly interpreted. You have up till now placed great reliance on Mr. Fred Ladd to manage the military assistance program. Although he is in Phnom Penh under State aegis and serves as a member of the Embassy staff, he is there because of his extensive military background. You will continue to look to him to manage the military assistance program.

—You are confident that he will find Ladd to be an effective individual who has thus far demonstrated a precise grasp of your objectives in Cambodia. You expect Ambassador Swank to give Ladd unusual leeway in the conduct of purely military affairs since Ladd was placed in Phnom Penh in lieu of establishing a formal high profiled military assistance group.⁴

—You want to stress the importance of the psychological benefits to Lon Nol and Cambodia which our aid can have.

—Every effort should be made to get more balanced and objective reporting of the situation in Cambodia by the press. This is vital to our securing the understanding and support needed in the US as basis for Congressional support of increased MAP and economic assistance to Cambodia. You have been especially disturbed by the biased reporting of the Associated Press team in Cambodia and hope that he will single out both Mr. Wheeler and especially Mr. Williams in an effort to achieve more balanced reporting from both of them.

—You consider Ambassador Swank as your personal representative and the head of the country team. You will back him to the hilt and look forward to hearing from him directly on his impressions and any recommendations he may have on ways to strengthen our Mission and to make our effort more effective.

—Ask Ambassador Swank to convey your personal warm best wishes to Lon Nol and your admiration for Cambodia's efforts to defend its neutrality.⁵

⁴ In a September 3 memorandum to Kissinger, Haig recommended informing Swank that Rives' "grasp of the President's objectives in Cambodia has been less than satisfactory," and that his team had not shown enough "impetus for establishing requirements for U.S. action." Haig stated that Swank should be warned not to "play his role too heavily in military assistance," lest the military "insist on a formal MAAG arrangement," and that Ladd would "answer to Swank as Ambassador for normal country-team efforts, but will also play a special role in answering to the military chain of command." He added that there had been cases in which instructions from the Department of State appeared "to clash with the President's overall objectives," and that if this occurred Swank should "backchannel directly for clarification." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 511, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. X)

⁵ Handwritten notes at the bottom of the page read: "Photo opp" and "Dr K will sit in."

33. Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, September 3, 1970.

SUBJECT

Current Status of the Pacification Program

In view of Ambassador Bunker's stated concern for the success of the Pacification program, as well as the enemy's priority targeting of it, it seems appropriate to provide you an assessment of the current status of this program.

Results of the Pacification Program during the first six months of 1970 were spotty. National attention was diverted by other pressing political and economic problems, and by operations in Cambodia. Veteran grievances and student demonstrations continue to cause distraction. The necessity for a reinvigoration of the Pacification effort was acknowledged in a Presidential decree which ordered a Special Pacification Program for the second half of the year. The focus regained by this order resulted in greater attention to the overall effort and improved results during the second calendar quarter.

A principal objective of the 1970 Pacification plan is a consolidation of security at the village level. This is, in fact, occurring although perhaps concealed by its undramatic character. The nationwide overall Pacification rating using the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) for population living in relatively secure areas (HES ABC) increased from 88% to 92.4% in spite of a regression in April. The April setback was due to a shift in communist tactics as they recognized the threat posed by the Pacification Program. The communists intensified terrorism throughout the country and succeeded in overrunning 29 Regional Forces, Popular Forces and Peoples Self-Defense Forces (PSDF) outposts during April and May. Nonetheless, the primary defense of over 2,000 hamlets is provided by the PSDF who, with few exceptions, have stood and fought in defense of their hamlets. Continued improvement in arming and training the PSDF is underway.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 149, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, 1 September 1970. Confidential. Holdridge forwarded the memorandum to Kissinger under a September 10 covering memorandum, commenting that Laird considered "GVN strength and action to be more important factors than enemy efforts" and that "Viet Cong activity can cause a lot of fluctuation in the statistics over any given period."

Additional efforts at increasing the strength and quality of the National Police, especially at the local level, are included in plans for the second half of the calendar year. Neutralization of VC Infrastructure attained its numerical goals in June. However, it continues to be most successful mainly against the lower echelons, leaving the overall party organization viable. Recognition of the importance of the program is slowly being realized. Increased GVN interest and improved US selection and training of Phoenix advisors should contribute to improvement of this vital program.

Currently, five US, ten ARVN and one other Allied battalion are involved primarily in pacification support. In keeping with our current strategy the local security mission is increasingly being assumed by territorial forces. Although ARVN regular units will continue to be primarily oriented on the VC/NVA main force threat, as US redeployments proceed, ARVN units must increasingly assume the mission of backing up territorial forces. Stress is being placed on this aspect of Vietnamization.

Although the majority of goals for the first six months were not achieved, progress is being made in carrying out the eight basic Pacification Programs as is shown in the attached detailed assessment.² Perhaps more important, President Thieu recognized in early 1970 the need for increased attention and effort at all GVN levels in order to accomplish the goals of the 1970 Pacification Program. Accordingly, a program of emphasis was initiated in May 1970 and a Special Pacification Campaign undertaken by Presidential decree on 1 July 1970. An accelerated target date of 31 October was assigned for achievement of most year end goals. The overall program is getting personal direction from President Thieu and subordinate Military Region Commanders and Province Chiefs. Weaknesses exist in social and economic areas of refugee care, veterans affairs, inflation, and student unrest and these are being addressed, although no quick solutions are foreseen.

Mel Laird

² Attached but not printed.

34. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Paris, September 7, 1970, 9:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Xuan Thuy, Chief of North Vietnamese Delegation
Mai van Bo, North Vietnamese Delegate General in Paris
Phan Hien, Member of North Vietnamese Delegation
North Vietnamese Interpreter
One other North Vietnamese Official
Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Major General Vernon Walters, Defense Attaché
W. Richard Smyser, NSC Staff
Winston Lord, NSC Staff

There was some opening exchange of pleasantries, during which Xuan Thuy introduced Mr. Phan Hien, a member of the North Vietnamese delegation in Paris.

Mr. Kissinger: And how is Mr. Special Adviser Le Duc Tho?

Xuan Thuy: Thank you for asking. He is alright. But he has a great deal of work to do in Hanoi. He asked me to convey his regards to you.

Mr. Kissinger: I appreciate that. I hope you will convey my warm personal regards. May I present Mr. Winston Lord, one of my close collaborators on my personal staff.

I will not debate you today over who should speak first.

Xuan Thuy: Of course, since Mr. Special Adviser said he has a new approach to expound, I am prepared to listen.

Mr. Kissinger: As I pointed out in my message,² I believe we should *both* look for new approaches. But I shall say something, and then I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

One practical matter for the information of the Minister. In France, the only organization which knows of these meetings is the office of the Presidency, not the Foreign Ministry. You may want to keep this in mind.

On our delegation, only Ambassador Bruce knows about these meetings, and nobody else.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 853, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David Vol. V. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting took place at the North Vietnamese Residence, 11 Rue Darthe, Paris.

² The July 1 U.S. note to the DRV is in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume VII, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Document 337.

No other U.S. diplomat knows.

We do not talk about it to any of your allies, though we are often asked. I say this only for your information, without requesting anything.

Lastly, I would like to tell you that Ambassador Bruce has our full confidence and is fully empowered to negotiate with you on all issues. He was selected because we believe he is the ablest and most experienced diplomat now available in the United States.

We regard the appointment of Ambassador Bruce as a significant step, which we took after repeated urging from you and your friends. At our meeting on February 21,³ Special Adviser Le Duc Tho said that a new American negotiator would be taken as a sign of good will, and such a step would contribute to serious negotiations. We expect that this will be the case.

The President has also asked me to emphasize again his desire to end this conflict as soon as possible through a negotiated settlement.

The two sides have fought for many years. As I have said on many occasions, we recognize the difficulties in ending your long and heroic struggle. The President has made it clear that we seek a peace which is just to both sides, which humiliates neither. We approach you with good will and a serious attitude. We hope that you will approach these discussions in the same spirit.

This is the fifth time that I have flown across the Atlantic to meet with you. Clearly the President would not send his Special Assistant on these missions to either hear or pronounce tired slogans. I am here not to win a dialectical debate but to work with you to forge an early peace. I would not be here if the President did not want a forum which provided us with a maximum flexibility to treat the problems of war.

Let me state very frankly that very soon you will have to make certain basic decisions about the way you wish to end this conflict. We continue to want to end the war swiftly through negotiations. But since we have not been able to engage you in serious negotiations, we have been forced to follow the alternative route of gradual withdrawals keyed to the strengthening of South Vietnamese forces.

We are prepared to continue this route, but we prefer a negotiated settlement. I ask you once again to take the path of negotiation with us. It is consistent with the self-respect and the objectives of both sides. We recognize the depth of your suspicions but they will not fade as time goes on and the struggle persists. This is the nature of war.

We are nearing the time when the chances for a negotiated settlement will pass. After a certain point you will have in effect committed

³ See *ibid.*, Documents 189 and 190.

yourselves to a test of arms. I do not want to predict how this test against a strengthened South Vietnam, supported by us, will end nor how long it will last. But you must recognize that it will make any settlement with the United States increasingly difficult.

Let us therefore move toward a negotiated settlement while there is still time. In our last meeting, I explained that time is not necessarily on your side. This is even more true now.

We should negotiate before time runs out and we are irrevocably committed to letting events run their course.

In previous sessions I proposed setting a target date for completing these negotiations, but you have not accepted this proposal. I still believe such a target date would give our talks concreteness and urgency.

I would now like to make a procedural point and then go on to a discussion of substantive problems.

On the procedural point, we agreed previously that we could have three forums. There would be these meetings, in which I would participate.

There would be private meetings, at which henceforth Ambassador Bruce will represent us. And there will be the meetings at the Hotel Majestic, which will test the endurance of all parties.

As for the meetings I attend, we believe they should deal with the fundamental principles and the main outlines of a settlement. They should take place only when significant progress is possible and when flexibility is required. The principles agreed to in the meetings between the Minister and myself should be translated into specific procedures and detailed agreements in the other forums.

The President has asked me to say that he cannot justify my attendance to hear a repetition of arguments made in other forums. This forum affords both sides the maximum possibility for flexibility because its participation is restricted and because the level of its participants is high. If it is not used for that end, it serves no purpose.

Let me now turn to the problems which confront us at this juncture.

Let me state first, in all frankness, the obstacles presented by your side, as they appear to us.

The first problem is your insistence on preconditions.

These prejudice the outcome of a settlement before negotiations even begin. There is no point in my being here for such an exercise.

Secondly, on several occasions in the past we have made moves that you told us would produce serious negotiations, and in one of which I was personally involved, as the Delegate General will remember. We stopped the bombing; we began withdrawing our forces;

we agreed to meet with the National Liberation Front; we agreed in principle to the withdrawal of all our forces from Vietnam; we have withdrawn forces, close to 200,000, over the last year and a half. Last year, in one of the enigmatic statements in which the Minister specializes, he indicated on September 2 that a withdrawal of 100,000 Americans would be significant. We have withdrawn nearly double that number and there has been no response.

I am here to tell you that we will be generous and flexible once there is serious progress in our negotiations. But I must tell you equally seriously that we have no intention of once again paying a price merely to open negotiations.

Most importantly, you must understand that your two preconditions are mutually inconsistent. You insist that we withdraw unilaterally and completely *and* that we remove the leaders of the present government of South Vietnam. What possible incentive would we have to do *both* of these things? If we withdraw unconditionally, and if you want to change the government of South Vietnam, that would be your problem, not ours. If you want to discuss the political problem with us, you have to give up your preconditions. We, in turn, are prepared to discuss political and military issues together with good will.

We have also noticed in your negotiating approach the tendency to step up military pressure to accompany negotiations. At our last meeting, I told you that such actions were bound to have unfortunate consequences. I repeat that today and I must caution you against increases in military pressures throughout Indochina. At the same time, I want to remind you of our note of July 1, 1970, in which we agreed to forego military pressure as a means of settling the war. We mean to carry this out very seriously.

Now let me turn to substance. In our last series of meetings we agreed to deal with political and military issues side by side. We gave you a precise withdrawal schedule and we advanced some principles for a political settlement.

You said at the last meeting that you considered our withdrawal schedule which we presented to you on March 16,⁴ as a step backward.

I recognize that Minister Xuan Thuy is notoriously difficult to please, but nevertheless we looked at the schedule again in the light of his comments. We have looked at the schedule again and I want now to present to you the following proposal covering a period of 12 months instead of a period of 16 months. I hope the Minister takes me as seriously as I take him. I am presenting you this new schedule as proof

⁴ See *ibid.*, Document 201.

of our good will and of our intention to find a means of settling the conflict.

Under a 12-month schedule, we would withdraw our forces at the following rate: Should I give this?

Xuan Thuy: Please.

Mr. Kissinger:	The First Month:	5,000
	Second Month:	10,000
	Third Month:	10,000
	Fourth Month:	45,000
	Fifth Month:	35,000
	Sixth Month:	44,000
	Seventh Month:	60,000
	Eighth Month:	60,000
	Ninth Month:	60,000
	Tenth Month:	20,000
	Eleventh Month:	20,000
	Twelfth Month:	15,000

This schedule is based on the level of our troop strength that we will reach on October 15. If we were to negotiate a settlement before then, or later, appropriate adjustments would be made. The exact details of the schedule can be negotiated.

As I told you before, we would arrange for roughly the same proportion of Allied forces to be withdrawn as our own. You will notice that we have moved the heaviest withdrawals into the period starting with the fourth month, taking account of a point the Minister made at our last session.

There are two fundamental points; first, we have accepted the principle of total withdrawal; second, we have presented a schedule for total withdrawal. We believe that our attitude, if reciprocated, can lead to a rapid end of the conflict.

Let me now turn to the political questions. I talked at some length on these matters at our last meeting and elaborated on some of our proposals.

We have made it clear both privately and publicly that we are ready to discuss a political settlement that could meet any reasonable objective. For example, on April 20, the President publicly defined three basic principles that govern our view of a fair political settlement⁵ and which I had already described in our political discussions here.

⁵ See footnote 5, Document 31.

—First, our overriding objective is a political solution that reflects the will of the South Vietnamese people and allows them to determine their future without outside interference.

—Second, a fair political solution should reflect the existing relationship of political forces.

—Third, we will abide by the outcome of the political process which we have agreed upon.

The essential task is to find a political process that meets the requirements of reflecting the existing political realities in South Vietnam.

What results from a political process can be different from what exists when that process is established. We have no intention of interfering with the political evolution produced by the process agreed upon here.

As I said at our last meeting, we fully recognize that it is very difficult to work out a political process that is fair to everyone.

I also pointed out that the sharing of political power is not the most obvious conclusion that one draws from a study of Leninism nor for that matter from Vietnamese history. We recognize the difficulty of the task. But, if there is to be any purpose to meeting, we must make progress on this issue as well as on the military issues.

Having said this, it is important that we understand fully the limits of one another's positions. Our flexibility is clear. However, the one condition we cannot agree with is the replacement of the leaders of the present South Vietnamese Government.

We believe that our principles for a political settlement provide the framework for a negotiated end to this conflict. If you adopt a positive attitude toward them, you will find us willing to search in good faith and with great flexibility to find a political process that will meet your essential concerns.

I recognize the depth of your suspicions. But I sometimes wonder whether the same qualities which make you fight with so much courage, dedication, and stubbornness, may not be the same ones which make negotiations difficult.

If we had agreed last year, there would now no longer be American troops in South Vietnam.

If you could accept the principles which I have advanced here as being expressed in good faith, you would find that we would move rapidly toward a negotiated settlement which would be fair to you also.

In this small group, there is no point in vilifying each other. We are empowered by our governments to go directly to the heart of these problems. We have an obligation to our peoples to do so. So let us set up a work schedule for an early end of the conflict.

Let me conclude by reiterating my pleasure at meeting with you again and by saying that I hope our efforts will be crowned with early success.

In that case, I hope the Minister and the Delegate General, and the absent Special Adviser, will remember that they have promised to visit me in the United States when this is finished. They can address my seminar at Harvard.

Xuan Thuy: But I think not about Marxism or Leninism.

Mr. Kissinger: Yes; there is a probability that you will be greeted there with greater enthusiasm than I.

Xuan Thuy: You have finished? Before we have a little break, I would like to ask a few questions for clarification.

Mr. Kissinger: I see that absence has not diminished the Minister's tenacity.

Xuan Thuy: Regarding the military problems, Mr. Special Adviser has spoken with some concreteness.

But regarding the political problems, Mr. Special Adviser only repeated the three principles put forward by President Nixon. May I ask you then, what is new in this political proposal? It is not yet clear to me.

Because what you mean by "existing relationship of political forces" is not clear. What do you mean by that?

You said also that the political process should meet the requirement of reflecting this relationship. What do you mean by that principle? And what do you mean by political process? May I ask you to explain your views?

Mr. Kissinger: Could the Minister adopt a principle I have learned from him? Please ask all questions at once and I will answer them at once.

Xuan Thuy: So there are two questions.

Mr. Kissinger: Are these the only questions?

Xuan Thuy: There are two questions in connection with substance, but if your answers enlighten me, I will have no more questions. If the answers are not clear then I may have more.

Mr. Kissinger: The Minister would have a great career as a professor. And I have many colleagues who wish him that.

Xuan Thuy: If I adopt this career as professor I wouldn't be equal to you, because you are a veteran in this matter.

Mr. Kissinger: Let me answer your questions:

As I pointed out at the last meeting, Mr. Minister, in discussing a political process the matter is different from a military process. In the military process, the decisions remain under our control until they are carried out. In the political process, the mere fact of discussion creates a new reality.

I have told the Minister that we could not agree to the replacement of the existing government as a precondition to negotiations.

I have also pointed out that the political process should reflect existing realities. The NLF is clearly an existing reality. If we agree to move toward a political settlement, keeping this in mind, and particularly if we are working within a fixed time limit, we would do our very best to take this into account.

Let me remind you of another principle I established at a previous meeting. You seem to have an overwhelming fear that you will be tricked by us, as you think you were in 1954.

I have too much respect for your intelligence to believe that it could be done. But even if it were possible, we would not do it. Not necessarily out of goodwill, but out of self-interest. If a settlement is to last you must want to keep it. If we keep to our withdrawal schedule, you will be much closer to South Vietnam than we. And history teaches that you will fight when you believe that an accord has been violated.

So, greater precision will have to await an agreement in principle on what we are trying to do.

Xuan Thuy: Have you finished?

Mr. Kissinger: Yes.

Xuan Thuy: But I must tell Mr. Special Adviser and at the same time professor that your explanation about the political process is not clear yet. Could you give further explanation about it?

Mr. Kissinger: In a general way.

What we should agree to do is to accept all the existing political forces in South Vietnam as existing realities. We will not tell you who the members of the PRG should be. You should not tell us who the members of the Saigon Government should be.

We should then attempt to set up a political process which gives a possibility for each side to achieve whatever political support it can muster, but which does not guarantee in advance that either side will win. And we should both agree to respect the outcome.

One reason it is not clear is because it is a very difficult problem.

Xuan Thuy: Have you finished?

Mr. Kissinger: (Nods)

Xuan Thuy: Let us take as granted that I have that uncertainty now, and I propose that we should break a little moment.

There was a break of about twenty-five minutes, during which there was some initial exchange of pleasantries between several members of the group. After that, Xuan Thuy retired with Phan Hien to work on his text. Mai Van Bo remained to chat with Dr. Kissinger.

Bo made the following principal points: that Americans do not understand Vietnamese; that the Vietnamese want complete freedom, without foreign interference; that it was important to get to the heart of the political problem; that the elections held in South Vietnam were

not a true expression of the popular will; that he recognized that the problem was very difficult to resolve. He was very cordial throughout.

Dr. Kissinger made the following points: that Bo was his oldest friend here (at which Bo smiled); that we recognized that elections were not the traditional way of settling political issues in Vietnam; that the United States and Vietnam were not historical enemies; that in 50 years, somebody reading the history of this period would wonder how the war could have developed.

At the end of the break light refreshments were served in a social setting, different from earlier meetings, before resuming the session.

Mr. Kissinger: May I compliment your interpreter who is always patient and capable.

Xuan Thuy: Mr. Special Adviser has said he was glad to meet us again and he inquired after Mr. Le Duc Tho. I would also like to express our gladness at meeting you again and thank you for your inquiry about Le Duc Tho.

After listening to the presentation by the Special Adviser of the views of the U.S. Government, I would like to express the following views:

Regarding the procedures and the reasons, you have spoken at great length. But, on substance, you have spoken briefly. Therefore, I shall also speak at length in the first part, and briefly in the second. Because in the first part, you are very abundant in ideas.

Our people, the Vietnamese people, want nothing from anyone but independence and peace and friendship with all other people in the world. When invaded by foreign aggression, the Vietnamese people, both in North and South Vietnam, will fight against foreign aggression.

The whole world knows that Vietnam is a very small country in Southeast Asia. But the Vietnamese people have been fighting for independence and democracy, no matter how great the enemy. Nobody can threaten us. We want peace, not violence or force. We have been compelled to use force to defend our fatherland and our right to live. We have been compelled to do so.

Mr. Special Adviser said he has come here for negotiations, but we want to use force to make pressure in the negotiations. This is the reverse of what we understand. It is with the desire for a peaceful settlement that we come here. That is why we have continued to participate in these negotiations for over two years now.

But I must reiterate what I told Mr. Bruce at the last session.⁶ It is President Nixon who has used force to make pressure in negotiations.

⁶ Reference is to the 82d plenary session of the new Paris meetings on Vietnam held at the Hotel Majestic on Avenue Kleber on September 3.

The Vietnamization policy is aimed at continuing and prolonging the war, refusing to withdraw U.S. troops and maintaining the Saigon Administration. President Nixon stated that the U.S. Government must negotiate from a position of strength, in order to make pressure on us in the negotiations.

The U.S. has intensified the war, the activities in the air, and has launched a great number of sweep operations, and extended the war to Laos and Cambodia. The statement by President Nixon that the U.S. must negotiate from a position of strength is known to everyone.

Mr. Kissinger: Except me.

Xuan Thuy: Yes, it is in one of his speeches.

Mr. Kissinger: I'll let you finish.

Xuan Thuy: The dispatch of U.S. troops into Cambodia is obvious. You can't say we are making pressure on you. It is the U.S. which makes pressure on us. The U.S. thought it could intimidate the Vietnamese people by extending the war to Laos and Cambodia. As a result, the U.S. has sunk deeper and has met with more difficulties, and it will be difficult for the U.S. to get out of the war now. Maybe the evaluations differ on your side. You may think that by your operations in Cambodia you have gained an advantage. As for us, we understand that the more the U.S. extends the war, the more difficulties the U.S. meets with.

As for your statement that time is not on our side, it may be different. We think time is on our side and not on the U.S. side.

But there is no need to debate whose side time is on.

I want to stress that so long as the Vietnamese people have not achieved genuine peace, genuine independence, and genuine democracy, they have to fight as long as necessary. No matter how long or how large the war conducted by the U.S.

This does not mean we do not want a peaceful settlement. We do want a peaceful settlement, the sooner the better. But if the U.S. prolongs and extends the war we have to cope with it.

You are right in saying that if we had agreed last year, the situation could have been better now. But how can we accept the conditions put forward by the U.S.?

As to the appointment of Ambassador Bruce to the Paris talks, Mr. Special Adviser said it was at our demand and other persons' demand. I remember that once I criticized the call-back of the U.S. representative, and I criticized the downgrading of the conference by the U.S., making the deadlocked conference fall into a serious impasse.

I told you then, and so did Mr. Le Duc Tho, that we remained in Paris to meet with Mr. Special Adviser once a week or every two weeks.

Mr. Kissinger: You are trying to ruin my social life.

Xuan Thuy: Without attending a session at the Majestic.

Mr. Kissinger: We appreciated that.

Xuan Thuy: And when you proposed to meet us again, we had to say that we had to await the arrival of Mr. Bruce before we could come to Paris to meet with you. So that question is resolved. Let's overlook it.

Regarding procedure, Mr. Special Adviser pointed out three forums. We have agreed. We will maintain our agreement.

Now for substance.

We have agreed to discuss both military and political problems.

As for the military problem.

Regarding your military proposal, at an earlier meeting you had proposed 16 months for withdrawal. We criticized this proposal as a setback. Now you return to a 12-month proposal. This is not different from what President Nixon originally said. So we must say that this is nothing new, and this is just a return to what President Nixon originally said and what we criticized before.

Mr. Kissinger: The Minister is a very hard man to please.

Xuan Thuy: This is not a question of satisfying me; it is a question of a reasonable proposal.

Mr. Kissinger: I am in no danger of becoming overconfident in dealing with Minister Xuan Thuy.

Xuan Thuy: As for us, we said previously that we support Mme. Binh's proposal for six months.⁷ You said this proposal had been put forward by Mme. Binh without consultation with the U.S. Then I told you that Mme. Binh is prepared to discuss this with you.

But since you will not discuss the question with Mme. Binh, then we can discuss it here with you.

You said that a six-month period seemed unreasonable for technical reasons; I don't know the technical reasons. The U.S. in the past could bring troops rapidly into South Vietnam. Then what technical reasons prevent you from withdrawing rapidly?

But if there are differences, then we can discuss these differences.

Secondly, regarding political problems.

You pointed out again President Nixon's three principles. I asked for clarification. But after your explanation, I am still not clear, and I still feel that they are not concrete enough.

Regarding the three principles:

The first is about the opportunity for the South Vietnamese people to decide their own future, without outside interference. We have

⁷ This was the second point of the DRV Ten Point peace proposal; see footnote 2, Document 35.

expressed ourselves many times on this principle. But how should we understand the context of this principle? We understand that this question should be solved by the Vietnamese without foreign interference, that is, without U.S. interference.

The second statement is that the political settlement should reflect existing political relationships in South Vietnam. Maybe our views differ on understanding this political relationship.

I do not know how you understand it. But you said this morning that if the U.S. withdraws completely from South Vietnam, the question of the Saigon Administration will not arise. This shows that your view is that if the U.S. withdraws rapidly from South Vietnam, the Saigon Administration will not be able to stand.

It is our view that the Saigon Administration has been established by the U.S. It is not genuinely democratic, and it is not democratically elected by the South Vietnamese people.

So, in order to make clear the political relationships, we should let the South Vietnamese people decide themselves.

I do not know how you understand the political relationships, but I assume it is as follows: that now all densely populated areas are under the control of the U.S. and the Saigon Administration; I am not sure. If this is your understanding, it does not conform to the real situation.

Because the population has been forced into one area and put under guard, and compelled to do as you like, does not mean a real political relationship.

The third point you raised is about respect for the political process. The view of Mr. Special Adviser is not yet clear to me. But in the ten points of the PRG, free elections have been mentioned. And the PRG spoke of general elections before President Nixon raised them.

But the main question is who will organize the elections. The PRG does not demand to have the right to do this. However, the Saigon Administration always says that it is the legal government, and has the right to organize elections. If it does not overtly say so, it presents solutions or proposals which boil down to the same ideas. That is why the PRG proposed to have an organization for assuming the tasks of elections, a provisional coalition government. And this provisional coalition government is not the monopoly of the PRG or of the Saigon Administration.

So how can you say that this proposal is unfair?

Mr. Special Adviser asked me to clarify the provisional coalition government. I say the provisional coalition government would include three components. But now you make the assertion that you will maintain the Thieu-Ky-Khiem Administration as it is. Then, if so, no settlement can be reached.

Because, Mr. Special Adviser said the U.S. wants to withdraw from South Vietnam. The U.S. wants to rapidly end the war. But it is precisely the present Saigon Administration which does not want to end the war, does not want the U.S. to withdraw, and does not want neutrality for South Vietnam.

So the present Saigon Administration is opposing communism, opposing withdrawal of U.S. troops, and opposing a neutral South Vietnam.

This means it wants the U.S. to stay in South Vietnam. If this is the desire of the Saigon Administration, does it reflect realities, the aspirations of the South Vietnamese people? No, it does not. It represents only a handful of people within the Saigon Administration.

So, in making these proposals, it does not mean that we are rigid. It means that we are reasonable and flexible. Therefore, I would like to propose that we should discuss the two problems, the military and political problems.

Covering military problems, Mme. Binh has proposed 6 months. If now you have any new ideas, we shall discuss them. If you want us to discuss your proposal, you should also take into account Mme. Binh's proposal. You should explain how this proposal is unreasonable. What are your technical difficulties?

As for political problems, I feel that Mr. Special Adviser's views are always the same he expounded before. There is no difference yet. The reason you have given for not being more concrete is not forceful. Therefore, I would like to propose that you think about the political question.

As far as we are concerned, we have come here to discuss with you, and the sooner we reach a settlement the better.

The prolongation of war is not in the interest of the Vietnamese or U.S. people. We want a prompt end of the war so that we can devote our efforts to reconstruction of our country. And I am sure some Americans also want to devote their efforts to other things. There are many areas where the U.S. can contribute its efforts. But if we are compelled to fight on, there is more reason for us to do so than you. We are on our own soil, not outside our country. The Vietnamese people are only defending Vietnamese soil. We fight because we are compelled by the U.S.

Peace is always the best course. Therefore, we share Mr. Special Adviser's views on a prompt end to the war. We have always maintained these views.

You are a busy man. These trips take a great deal of time for you. We too are busy. It is longer for us to come here than for you. The U.S. is only a few hours from Paris, but it takes me a week.

In brief, the sooner we come to a settlement, the better. It is not our desire, our will, if we are forced to prolong the fight.

Now, please, it is your time to speak.

Mr. Kissinger: I will do something you do not normally do with me, which is to say that I like the spirit in which you presented your remarks. I would like to ask for five minutes to talk with my colleagues about your remarks. This is an important meeting. We have to decide whether and how to continue.

(There was a thirteen minute break.)

Mr. Kissinger: Mr. Minister, let me make a few comments on your remarks, which I want to say again were put forward in a constructive spirit. I do not think any useful purpose is served by debating about every individual factual item in which our evaluation is different from yours. I will just make two factual points which I believe are relevant.

First, it is not true that we have intensified our air activities in Vietnam. The opposite is true—we have decreased our air activities in Vietnam and all of Indochina. I say this only in order to make sure that your leaders in Hanoi receive the exact reports. Our military people sometimes are over-enthusiastic; I don't say yours are.

The second point is that President Nixon, since he has become President, has never used the phrase "position of strength" vis-à-vis Hanoi.

Now to substance. The Minister said that our 12 month schedule returned to our original position. This is not quite accurate. As the Minister himself has pointed out to me on many occasions, the statements of the President never made it clear that we were talking about *total* withdrawal of American forces. There are two things at least which are new. First, we accept the principle of total withdrawal, including all military bases. Secondly, we give for the first time a precise schedule, month by month, which we declare irrevocable, in the case that you accept the whole settlement. You will notice also, Mr. Minister, that the vast majority of forces, about four-fifths, will be withdrawn in the first nine months.

Now, the Minister asked me about technical difficulties. Contrary to how it may have looked to you, it took us three years to bring the total number of forces we have into South Vietnam. The schedule we gave you here is based on realistic assessments of what is feasible if we are to move men together with their equipment. The only way it could be speeded up would be if we were to leave all our equipment behind. This is not to say that if after consultations with Mme. Binh you have a suggestion for minor adjustments that we would not consider it. I have the impression in any event that this is not the most difficult problem that we face.

Let me now make a few observations on the political side. First, a factual correction. I did not say, I did not mean to say, that if we withdraw our troops quickly the Saigon Government could not survive. What I meant to say was that if we withdraw our troops unconditionally and quickly what happens in Saigon is *your* problem and you will have to decide whether you can win a war with the Saigon Government or not.

I am not making a prediction of what will happen—I'm stating a fact that you cannot ask us to do both things simultaneously.

Now let me turn to the Minister's particular observations on the political process. As I understand the Minister, he had no major difficulties with our statement of principles. His difficulty was on how to realize them.

With respect to the first principle, of course we would consider North Vietnamese pressure also as outside pressure.

But let me turn to what I consider the most important part of what the Minister said. I have the impression that the Minister believes that when we speak of the existing relationship of political forces in South Vietnam, he thinks we are talking about partition. He seems to think that we believe that in this manner we or the Saigon Government can control densely populated areas and we would leave to the PRG some of the not-so-densely populated areas. This is not our understanding of the solution. We are prepared—I can say this on the highest authority—to have a political contest in *all* of South Vietnam, in areas controlled by the Saigon Government as well as in other areas.

This of course gets to the next question the Minister raised—how can you have such a political contest? Your proposal has been that the Saigon Government must be replaced before such an election can take place. As I have told you, for many reasons, this we cannot do. We are, however, prepared to work with you in order to try to find methods by which the people of South Vietnam can express their wishes freely through a number of devices which I believe we can work out together. You have been very suspicious with the concept of mixed electoral commissions. I don't care what we call them. I think that the essential thing is to concentrate on how to organize elections rather than how to organize a government. I believe we can then make progress.

I want to repeat again that we will accept the outcome of the political process that we agree to here, even if it should have an outcome different than what now exists.

The Minister has said that he does not believe that the present Saigon Government will accept any fair solution. With all due respect, I don't ask the Minister whether the PRG will accept whatever he agrees to, even though I am told Mme. Binh is a formidable figure. We would rely on your persuasive power on your allies, and you have to rely on our persuasive power vis-à-vis our allies. I would only like to point out that our persuasive power will be greater the earlier the settlement and the greater our presence in South Vietnam.

We are not children—we recognize that you did not fight 25 years in order to leave your friends in South Vietnam to the mercy of their opponents. We are prepared to have a realistic settlement, and if your assessment of the situation is correct, you should be prepared to have a realistic settlement.

Now, let me say a word about the future of our meetings here. During our first break, the Delegate General pointed out to me that the American people and leaders don't understand Vietnamese history and psychology adequately. He is undoubtedly correct, although, as I pointed out to him, you didn't survive for 2,000 years in the face of enormous outside pressures because you were easy people to understand.

But if I may use this occasion to be equally frank with you, I'm not sure you always understand American psychology adequately. We have a shorter history and less complex mind. You sometimes ascribe to us Vietnamese subtlety and complexity. I told the Delegate General that sometimes I have the impression that you are more afraid to be deceived than to be defeated by us. You indicate toward us sometimes slight changes in your position through a subtlety of language and nuances of formulation which for somebody like myself, who has spent many years to understand you, is comprehensible, but which is very difficult to make understandable to people in Washington. Even though I demonstrated my inexperience in diplomacy by telling the Minister that I thought his presentation was constructive, it will not be easy to convince my colleagues in Washington that he said anything radically different from what he has said before.

I am not trying to win arguments with you, whether you believe me or not. They will want to know why the principal assistant of the President should spend time engaged in these discussions. Therefore I believe that the quickest way to make progress is in these discussions, because we can cut short all bureaucratic debates. But in order to do this we must have a concrete work program.

Now my proposal is this. First, I believe we can settle the withdrawal issue in a few more meetings. On the political issue, we should put aside debate on who represents whom on the two opposing sides in South Vietnam. We should try to define precisely how we would organize elections in all of South Vietnam, whoever controls what territory. You should tell us what specifically worries you in those territories where the Saigon Government seems to have control. We will try in good will to work out procedures, not to guarantee you victory, but to satisfy your concerns.

If you are interested in a free expression for the people of South Vietnam, you will find that we will share your objective.

If we adopt this program and meet fairly frequently, I believe a rapid and fair end to the war is possible. And we know, as I said before, that if you should feel yourself deceived, it would not be an end of the war, but only an armistice; and this would not be in our interest.

But in all frankness I don't believe that the President will authorize many more meetings of this group if we do not have a concrete objective and a program to achieve it. If we are not going to be flexible, then discussions should be in diplomatic channels. That's all.

Xuan Thuy: Then what do you decide? On what day shall we meet again?

Mr. Kissinger: May I ask the Minister first whether this general approach is one I can report to the President as in principle agreeable to you?

Xuan Thuy: If so, then I should be allowed to express my views.

Mr. Kissinger: To answer your question, in principle, I am prepared to meet whenever it's useful.

Xuan Thuy: I should now express my views on the points you have just made. You said that the U.S. is also afraid of pressure North Vietnam will make on Saigon, and the U.S. considers this pressure as outside pressure. This is not true.

Mr. Kissinger: What is not true?

Xuan Thuy: I should tell you that the Vietnamese love one another. It's always easy to find solutions among the Vietnamese themselves. Whether in North Vietnam or South Vietnam, all of them are Vietnamese. Only there are a handful of Vietnamese foolish enough to listen to foreign aggressors, and they act counter to the aspirations of the Vietnamese people. Mai van Bo is from South Vietnam and I am from North Vietnam, but we live in good terms with each other.

Everyone knows that North Vietnam is socialist and we shall continue our path to socialism. You often said I'm a Marxist-Leninist, but I've never raised questions of Marxism-Leninism to you. Marxism-Leninism is something we understand among ourselves. Therefore when you invite me to come to Harvard, I ask you immediately whether I shall have to talk about Marxism-Leninism. Being a socialist country, we approve South Vietnam's being independent, peaceful and neutral. This shows we respect the reality of South Vietnam and the general desire of the South Vietnamese people. We don't want to make any pressure on the South Vietnamese population, to compel them to follow North Vietnam.

You also said that it appeared we understood your statement to mean partition for political expression.

Mr. Kissinger: That was my impression.

Xuan Thuy: If that was your impression, therefore I must explain that that is not our thinking. You see, the South Vietnamese people want Vietnam to be reunited. All Vietnamese want the reunification of the country. You see, the Vietnamese now living in South Vietnam but forcibly put into concentration camps and under guard, even they themselves and others out of sight are all Vietnamese, all the same nation. Vietnam is now partitioned into two parts. Many Vietnamese have deep thoughts that some day in the future the country will be unified. But North Vietnam will not make pressure or coerce South Vietnam to have immediate reunification. Reunification must be realized through peaceful negotiations on mutual agreement. This is a longer period

problem, not an immediate problem. It should be stressed that the will of South Vietnam is to be unified.

And I said previously that I presumed your understanding of political relationship is partition into areas. This is what I presumed you had in mind. I thought you have in mind that in case general elections are organized all over South Vietnam you believe Saigon will have a majority because the densely populated areas are under Saigon control. Then Saigon will be the winner in elections.

Even now you say you have no intention to guarantee victory to either side, and this will be left to the will of the people. This is what I mean—I think your understanding of political relationship is not correct. And therefore the herding of people into areas and putting them underground, forcibly done, is not a reflection of political relationship. Therefore this kind of political relationship should not be allowed to define political relationship. This is what I had in mind. I don't understand what you mean by partition.

You said that we were more afraid to be fooled than defeated. It is natural that in conditions of war there is suspicion on either side. But I don't mean that we are afraid to be fooled. We are afraid of nothing. We are not afraid of threats. Prolongation of fighting doesn't frighten us. Prolongation of negotiations doesn't frighten us. We are afraid of nothing.

The question is how to find a reasonable and logical conclusion.

Mr. Kissinger: I just wanted to caution the Minister not to overestimate me.

Xuan Thuy: Now you say that fair elections should be organized, but you insist on the maintenance of Thieu-Ky-Khiem and you consider this as a real political relationship. This is the most difficult obstacle to be resolved.

Mr. Kissinger: I agree.

Xuan Thuy: For the time being, the South Vietnamese people do not agree to Thieu-Ky-Khiem.

Mr. Kissinger: Let me make a point. If we can organize elections, then this point is academic. If the Minister is right, if the majority of the people want what he says, then they will be replaced, and we will accept this.

Xuan Thuy: A question arises on this point. The question lies in this point, in the fact that the puppet army is still there and the Thieu-Ky-Khiem Administration has been using this army to terrorize and force people. Then how can free general elections be organized?

That is why the proposal of the PRG is very logical and reasonable—because it proposes formation of a coalition government with the three previously stated components and then this provisional coalition government will not be under the influence of either.

Mr. Kissinger: In order to understand the PRG proposal, could Thieu-Ky-Khiem be part of the provisional government?

Xuan Thuy: You see, the provisional coalition government will include members of the present Saigon Administration except Thieu-Ky-Khiem because the South Vietnamese people hate Thieu-Ky-Khiem because they are very cruel. Therefore, they do not want to keep them. The longer you stick to Thieu-Ky-Khiem, it shows you don't want withdrawals from South Vietnam and you still want to use Thieu-Ky-Khiem as instruments of your policy. Thieu-Ky-Khiem excepted, then other members of the Saigon Government might participate in a coalition government. And since the three components of the provisional coalition government participate in the new government, then there is no longer the existence of the former government.

Therefore we believe that the PRG is very logical and reasonable. As to your approach, you want the situation as it is now and to continue it.

Mr. Kissinger: No, we are prepared to set up procedures, common or in other ways, in which no one is in control of elections.

Xuan Thuy: How will your views be feasible, particularly because your views deal only with the upper part but not the basic problem. U.S. troops will still be there.

Mr. Kissinger: The elections can be while U.S. troops are there, or not, as I told you last time. We have no fixed views on this point.

Xuan Thuy: But I want to say now with the present Saigon Administration with its army, how can fair elections be organized with such conditions, with the present Administration in power and with its army?

Mr. Kissinger: I understand your question and we should discuss it in greater detail. Here is my quick answer. For example, if we organize commissions—or whatever we call them—if we set out rules on who can do what in each area, on these commissions the NLF, the Saigon Government, and other groupings could be represented. As for the question of violations, one of two things could happen. Either there will be free elections which we all accept. Or there will not be free elections and you will continue fighting and you will be no worse off than you are now. Of course both armies will have to stop military operations as part of an arrangement.

Xuan Thuy: We don't want that after elections the two armies will resume fighting. I am sure that this is in the interest of the U.S., that they do not resume fighting after elections. Therefore a radical solution must be found.

Therefore, here is what I am thinking. First, we have agreed to maintain the three forums. Secondly, at this forum, as we have agreed previously, we will continue to discuss military and political problems

together. And at this forum the sooner we reach a settlement of fundamental problems the better.

Besides this, both sides must think over the two problems we have raised. For instance, for the period of troop withdrawals you have proposed 12 months and Mme. Binh 6 months. She is not here today.

Mr. Kissinger: You have to talk to her.

Xuan Thuy: Then what period should we adopt, 6 or 12 months? What is most reasonable? By what way?

You said that the great majority of U.S. troops would be withdrawn in 9 months. During the four first months there are very small withdrawals. It takes 6 months for them to be significant. This is one detail to be discussed.

Therefore even for military problems we should think them over and discuss further.

As for political problems, you do not bring anything new. We have proposed a number of points previously and today. We have given further clarification. After these clarifications, we believe that the proposal of the PRG is all the more reasonable. Therefore I agree with Mr. Special Adviser—there are many things which need further discussion.

But there is one thing Mr. Special Adviser laid stress on: that you cannot drop Thieu-Ky-Khiem before elections. As for us, we lay emphasis on the fact that if Thieu-Ky-Khiem are not changed then we can't settle this fundamental problem. This is not an expression of pre-conditions, but is designed to find the most reasonable solution. This is what we have been saying. Let us think it over; you think it over.

Mr. Kissinger: You want us to think it over?

Xuan Thuy: You should further think it over because what we have been saying we feel is all the more reasonable today.

Mr. Kissinger: If the President asks me—and he will—what have I achieved that has not been achieved at the Hotel Majestic and what the Minister tells me that is different, what should I tell the President?

Xuan Thuy: You will answer to the President that since you are at this meeting with instructions not different from what the American delegates say at Avenue Kleber (Mai van Bo interjects in Vietnamese and Xuan Thuy qualifies)—nothing different on political problems—therefore Minister Xuan Thuy says nothing different either. It appears that after a preliminary exchange of views that Xuan Thuy has given clearer explanations and believes he is more reasonable.

As for military questions you have proposed 12 months and Mme. Binh 6 months. There must be discussions to settle this.

Mr. Kissinger: That is conditional on other domains that we must settle. If there is not agreement in other domains, then there will be no withdrawals.

May I ask the following question? Does there exist the theoretical possibility that after studying my remarks the Minister might discover something new and maybe make changes? Or do we have to make all the modifications?

Xuan Thuy: For the time being I tell you what I have been saying is reasonable and what you point out is unreasonable. Therefore both sides should study each other's statements.

On the point about Thieu-Ky-Khiem, I cannot agree with you.

There are many ways to answer the White House people. You say you come here to make explanations, you make threats—

Mr. Kissinger: No threats.

Xuan Thuy: After what both sides have sat down to discuss. In brief we want to find ways to reach a realistic and reasonable solution. The essential objective of the Vietnamese people is genuine independence and freedom.

Mr. Kissinger: I think we have taken this discussion as far as we can today. (Xuan Thuy nods.) How long does the Minister need to study the discussions today?

Xuan Thuy: It is up to your program.

Mr. Kissinger: Two or three weeks.

Xuan Thuy: All right. Fix a date, please.

Mr. Kissinger: I take it we would not interfere with the Minister's religious observances if we fixed Sunday?

Xuan Thuy: Being a Marxist-Leninist, I don't go to church. I respect those who go to church. I don't know whether you go to church.

Mr. Kissinger: September 27?

Xuan Thuy: (Some discussion among the Vietnamese.) Sunday?

Mr. Kissinger: 9:30? If you have given up Sunday, I must do the same to express my respect for you. My girl friends worry. I disappear on Sundays and can't say where I am.

Xuan Thuy: It is lucky you are not married. If you were married, your wife would be much more worried.

Mr. Kissinger: That is a good point.

Let me say a few words in the domain of a political science lecture about the U.S. Government. Your government, as I understand it, is highly organized and well disciplined. Our government is very large and complicated—it is one of the penalties for being an industrially developed society. In our government only the White House and Ambassador Bruce are familiar with our discussions. It is therefore possible that other things happen which, precisely to guard the confidential nature of our discussion, we will not be able to control. Therefore it is possible that certain events happen which in order to preserve confi-

dential discussions we cannot stop. I am not talking about military actions.

You should keep this in mind and if you have any questions you should ask me. I shall tell you exactly what will happen.

While confidence in Americans is not your most distinguishing feature, I would say that if you don't have a minimum of confidence in our relationship the situation could become complicated.

When you study these remarks I would like to take the liberty of calling your party's attention to my explanation of American thinking and the impact of your approach on us. I know you have not come through 2,000 years of history by being very yielding and excessively flexible. But since I think our next meeting will be very important, I would like to suggest for you to study and consider the following.

I am not one of those Americans to whom you must prove that you must be tough or strong or unyielding. I am not trying to trick you. You see many people who make many declarations, but they are not in a position to produce anything. This channel is the best—maybe the only, way to have maximum influence in Saigon. We would not abuse a generous attitude on your part because we know that if we did you would only redouble your efforts. There is nothing that we would rather do than to be able to make a contribution to a just peace which takes account of the suffering of all people, especially all the courageous Vietnamese people.

That is why I would like to urge you to consider the modifications which could give our discussions vitality and urgency.

Xuan Thuy: As you know, our history has shown that when the adversary party shows rigidity, the Vietnamese people know how to show greater rigidity, but when the adversary party shows reasonableness, the Vietnamese people know how to show reasonableness. (Mr. Kissinger nods. Xuan Thuy nods and smiles.)

Now, Mr. Senior Adviser says that this is the best channel to settle problems. I think so too. Of all the forums this is the best one to discuss a settlement of the problem.

I told Mr. Senior Adviser that in extended fighting the Vietnamese people remain resolute and determined, but they prefer a prompt settlement of problems. A peaceful settlement reached here will be in the interests of both peoples, Vietnamese and American. Therefore both sides should show good will and serious intent. We have been saying to each other these things, but the question is how to go into specific problems in a logical way and a reasonable way. We are prepared to discuss with you in a forthcoming, logical and reasonable way.

Mr. Kissinger: We have only one other problem, purely technical. General Walters has been driving me crazy all summer to go to Japan. I have kept him here for a variety of reasons. Now he plans to leave

town and will be back just before September 27. Is there any possibility you would wish to contact me before September 27?⁸

Xuan Thuy: (Xuan Thuy consults his colleagues.) For the time being I don't see any.

Mr. Kissinger: There are two ways to handle this. If for urgent reasons you wish to contact me, we could designate another person here. I am reluctant to do this, because we want to keep the number of people who know our relationship very small. Another possibility is that you send Mr. Lord a telegram at his home address with a fictitious name, saying you have a message from a friend. (Kissinger and Walters discussed dates.) In that case, we would then send Mr. Lord over here to see you. (Xuan Thuy nods.) Perhaps it would be better to contact Mai van Bo.

General Walters: He could use the same name, André.

Mr. Kissinger: Conversely, if I have a message, I will send a telegram to you under his name. This is all very unlikely, but I like to prepare for the unforeseen.

Like what I told you about our large bureaucracy, we now have the problem that one of General Walters' superiors is arriving that particular week and how do we explain why he is not here? I will try to use my influence to change the schedule of his superior's trip. In the unlikely event we cannot change the date, my influence will be even less than I thought. This won't be necessary.

Xuan Thuy: As to what you said about our discussions only being known to us, Ambassador Bruce, and the President's office here, any leakage is from your side. We do not leak anything.

Mr. Kissinger: There has been none.

Xuan Thuy: We should maintain this habit.

Mr. Kissinger: It is very much in our interest.

Xuan Thuy: We do not leak.

Mr. Kissinger: This is very secure.

The meeting ended at 2:30 p.m. with some closing pleasantries, during which Xuan Thuy, in reply to Mr. Kissinger's question, said that Le Duc Tho would return to Paris. Thuy was very friendly in this parting exchange.⁹

⁸ General Walters was the confidential contact point between Kissinger and Xuan Thuy.

⁹ Kissinger approved a memorandum, September 11, which included an edited version of the memorandum of conversation that was to be sent to Bunker. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 853, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. V) The edited memorandum of conversation used code names for the participants—Yul for Xuan Thuy, Nestor for Mai Van Bo, and Luke for Kissinger. (Ibid.)

35. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, September 7, 1970.

SUBJECT

My Meeting with Xuan Thuy, September 7, 1970

I met with Xuan Thuy for nearly five hours on September 7. As you know, I had expected little but vituperation. Instead, the atmosphere was the friendliest of any of these sessions—indeed of any session with the Vietnamese in the whole history of the negotiations. This was particularly striking since it was the first meeting since Cambodia. Cambodia was mentioned only once in passing and then only in rebuttal to my warning that they had brought military pressure in the spring.

Not only did they change their tone, but they also indicated a readiness to move on substance. They in effect dropped their demand for a 6-month “unconditional” withdrawal schedule, made no mention of the 10 points,² and indicated that they would reconsider their political proposals. They are very anxious to continue this channel, coming back repeatedly with proposals to meet again when I insisted that this channel required major progress.

I made very clear that we were not going to replace the present government in Saigon before a political process was engaged, and that there would have to be real progress if this channel was to be maintained.

What Was New or Significant

—The North Vietnamese tone throughout was remarkably moderate, with almost no propaganda rhetoric and considerable direct discussion of substance. There was no standard speech about U.S. aggression, no reference to the U.S. domestic situation or any other standard maneuver.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 853, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. V. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information.

² Reference is to the Ten-Point Overall Solution, a plan for ending the war in Vietnam put forward by Tran Buu Kiem of the NLF at the May 8, 1969, session of the Paris Peace Talks. It is printed in *Documents on American Foreign Relations, 1968–1969*, pp. 249–252. See also *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume VI, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Document 67.

—Thuy indicated very clearly that they would review their proposed six-month schedule for U.S. withdrawals and implied strongly that he would move towards our 12 month schedule. He made no reference to unconditional withdrawals.

—Regarding political issues, he accepted for the first time the three principles of your April 20 speech as practical proposals, though raising questions about the specific measures to bring them about.

- He agreed to the first principle (self-determination) though he indicated that the North Vietnamese expected to bring about unification. He stated, however, that unification was a long-term problem.

- He did not object to the second principle (that the settlement should reflect the existing relationship of political forces) though he said we differed on our understanding of the existing relationships, overestimating the strength of the Saigon regime.

- On the third principle (acceptance of the results) he indicated that their side would respect the results of the political process. He claimed the PRG had spoken of elections before we had. But he asserted that the main question was who should organize the elections.

—He did not attack the idea of electoral commissions—as has been standard. Instead he asked specific questions about its operation. He did not accept it however.

—He emphasized that Hanoi was prepared to wait a long time for unification of Vietnam.

—In this meeting they came closer than in any other to revealing some of their own problems. For example, Thuy explained that they were not as weak as we thought (when they had earlier claimed that we had lost).

—He was almost insistent on another meeting to give each side a chance to review its position. He seemed prepared to have it at any time at our convenience. We finally settled on September 27.

—He showed considerable desire to keep this channel open and to meet frequently. He said they regarded it as the fastest and most reliable means to end the war. He repeatedly and emphatically stated their desire for a rapid settlement.

What Was Negative

—Although Thuy said many moderate and promising things, they have as yet given nothing from which they cannot pull back.

—He did not come up with anything new on the role of the South Vietnamese Government in a provisional coalition; he finally repeated their position that Thieu, Ky or Khiem could not be in such a coalition, although he indicated that others from the GVN could be.

—He also said that no settlement could be reached if we keep Thieu–Ky–Khiem,³ though he did not push hard on this point and said we should meet again after both sides had reviewed their positions.

—He raised the sensitive question of what would happen to South Vietnamese armed forces, which may indicate they are serious but also suggests that they will try to disband or reduce Saigon’s control of those forces before a settlement.

What Was Inconclusive

It is still difficult to judge whether they are just trying to keep us talking or have real intent of moving on to substantive negotiations. Their position today was consistent with either objective, although it was much more oriented toward serious discussions than at any other previous meeting. It was also the most friendly of any of these sessions and unprecedented in the absence of self-justifying polemics by them.

I think that they are now in a position where they have to move. They know that, and they have indicated a readiness to do so. What they said was consistent with a desire to advance toward a settlement on basic issues, though it did not irrevocably commit him. They could hardly have gone further on those issues than they did at this particular meeting, given the enormously tough problem accepting the Thieu government gives them.

We will be able to see at the next meeting whether they actually will change their position, and we will then be able to decide whether to continue the channel.

What Happened

—I read my prepared opening statement in which I:

- underlined the appointment of Ambassador Bruce which they had said would be a significant step for serious negotiations. He enjoys your full confidence.
- pointed out that they will soon have to choose how they wish to end the conflict. We are near a time when chances for a negotiated settlement will pass and they will have committed themselves to a test of arms against a strengthened South Vietnam supported by us.
- explained that our restricted sessions should take place only when significant progress is possible and flexibility required.
- emphasized why their preconditions were unacceptable.

³ The President underlined this phrase and wrote the following note above: “This is probably the breaking point, unless we can find a formula.”

- cautioned them again against using military pressure to accompany negotiations and said that we were ready in turn to forego military pressure as a means of settling the war.

- presented our 12 month withdrawal schedule.

- reiterated our willingness to discuss a fair political settlement that will meet their essential concerns and repeated the three principles of your April 20 speech.

- stated that although we are flexible we cannot agree to the condition that we replace in advance the leaders of the South Vietnamese Government.

- appealed for them to join us in going to the heart of the problems in a search for the early end of the conflict.

—Xuan Thuy made brief comments before a break. He said I had spoken “with some concreteness” on military problems but that on political problems I had only repeated what you had said and he wondered what was new. He asked what was meant by reflecting “existing relationship of political forces” and by the political process.

—I repeated that we could not agree to the replacement of GVN leaders. I said that the NLF was an existing reality that we were prepared to take into account. And I said that we recognized that the North Vietnamese must have a stake in a political settlement if it is to last.

—Xuan Thuy, in the most conciliatory tone that I have heard the other side use in these meetings:

- stressed their desire for a rapid peace and claimed that we, not they, were using force to bring pressure on the negotiations.

- made a passing complaint that Vietnamization was aimed at prolonging the war and keeping the Saigon Administration in power.

- delivered a bare minimum statement on Cambodia, saying that our extension of war in Indochina was sinking us into a quagmire and was making more difficulties for us.

- said that Bruce’s appointment had merely rectified our downgrading of the Paris talks, during which they had remained in Paris, willing to meet with me regularly.

- stated that they agreed to the negotiating procedures outlined by me.

- said they were willing to solve the differences between our schedule and Madame Binh’s 6 month proposal.

- probed for the content and meaning of our three political principles. He in effect did not disagree with the principles but thought that our proposals would not realize these principles.

- misinterpreting “existing political relationships,” he said that they could not accept a situation where the GVN controlled all the densely populated areas.

- said that the main question was who will organize the elections. He declared that neither the PRG or Saigon government has the right to do this. This was the task of the provisional coalition government which would include the three components (from GVN, PRG and third forces). If we will maintain the Thieu–Ky–Khiem administration as it is, no settlement can be reached.

- reiterated their desire for a settlement and peace as rapidly as possible.

—I pointed out that our 12 month proposal concerned the total withdrawal of American forces, and represented a precise monthly schedule. It was not technically feasible to shorten it although we might consider minor adjustments.

—In response to his comments on the Saigon government's control in populated areas, I stressed our readiness for a political contest in all of South Vietnam but repeated that we could not agree to replace the GVN leaders. I said we should concentrate on how to organize elections rather than how to organize a government and mentioned the concept of mixed electoral commissions.

—I called for a specific work program on withdrawals and who organizes elections and emphasized that you would not authorize many more of these meetings unless we had concrete objectives and a program to achieve it.

—Xuan Thuy then asked on what day we should meet again, to which I said I first needed an answer for you whether my general approach was agreeable to them.

—Xuan Thuy then made another lengthy statement in which he:

- declared that all Vietnamese are one nation and that “some day in the future” they will be unified, although the North won't coerce the South with immediate reunification.

- said that our understanding of political relationships was incorrect, for it suggested that the Saigon government, being in control of densely populated areas, will have a majority in case of general elections. He indicated their opposition to partition and said that the GVN would lose a truly free election.

- stated that our insistence on maintenance of Thieu-Ky-Khiem is the most difficult obstacle to be resolved. He asked how free general elections could be organized with them in power and called instead for a provisional coalition government consisting of their suggested three components.

—In response to my query whether Thieu, Ky and Khiem could be part of the provisional coalition, they went to their standard formula that such a coalition could include members of the present Saigon administration except them.

—Thuy said that we wanted a situation as it is now, and I responded that we were prepared to set up procedures in which no one was in control of elections. Thuy asked how there could be free elections with the present administration and its army in power. I said that all groups could be represented on mixed commissions and rules for activities could be worked out.

—I reminded Xuan Thuy that our agreement on a withdrawal schedule was conditional on other parts of the settlement, without which there would be no such withdrawal.

—I then asked him if he would be willing to reconsider his positions, implying that if we had always to make the modifications we would break off the channel. Xuan Thuy responded that both sides should study each other's statements with a view to making modifications.

—Xuan Thuy said that he would reciprocate reasonableness and that this forum was the best for a rapid settlement. He stressed their desire for a prompt settlement and their willingness to discuss problems reasonably.

—The meeting closed at 2:30 p.m. with some technical discussion of how to maintain contact between us in the next few weeks.⁴

The next meeting was set for September 27 at 0930.

⁴ Kissinger also reported on the meeting in backchannel message WH051 to Bunker, September 9, noting that the "session was marked by the most conciliatory and moderate tone the other side has ever displayed in these sessions" and that they had agreed to meet again on September 27. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 853, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. V) On September 11, Bunker reported in backchannel message 484 that he had shown Kissinger's report to Thieu, who stated that the North Vietnamese "probably felt that they needed to try the temperature from time to time to test our determination and that this was particularly true after the events which had taken place in Cambodia." (Ibid.)

36. Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, September 10, 1970, 4:05–4:40 p.m.

SUBJECT

Cambodia

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

Mr. U. Alexis Johnson

Mr. Marshall Green

Mr. Thomas Pickering

Mr. James Wilson

Defense

Mr. David Packard

Mr. Dennis Doolin

CIA

Mr. Richard Helms

Mr. Thomas Karamessines

Mr. William Wells

JCS

Adm. Thomas H. Moorer

Lt. Gen. John Vogt

Lt. Gen. Melvin Zais

NSC Staff

Mr. John Holdridge

Col. Richard T. Kennedy

Mr. D. Keith Guthrie

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. *Thai-Khmer Troops.* The WSAG considered whether the Thai Khmer troops intended for deployment in Cambodia should be utilized as special guerrilla units in Southern Laos in view of the Cambodian government's opposition to using the Thai Khmers in Cambodia at the present time. Mr. Johnson left with Mr. Kissinger for approval a proposed cable directing Embassy Bangkok to seek Thai views on using the Thai Khmers in southern Laos.²

The WSAG also was informed of a Thai proposal to replace the regular Thai units at Long Tieng with special guerrilla units.

2. *Prairie Fire.* The WSAG was informed that replacement of American by indigenous personnel in Prairie Fire exploitation operations could not take place for ninety days and that withdrawal of American personnel before that time would curtail the effectiveness of the Prairie

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Top Secret; Nodis. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. A typed note indicates this is Part II of the summary and minutes; Part I is the record of the WSAG discussion of the Middle East, which immediately preceded the discussion of Cambodia.

² In telegram 151249 to Bangkok, September 15, the Department described the details of the proposal for the Thai Khmer troops and asked for the Embassy's comments. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, DEF 6 THAI)

Fire program. It was agreed that Mr. Kissinger should seek the President's views on whether continuation of American involvement in exploitation operations for ninety days is desirable, taking into account the domestic political risks involved. Prairie Fire operations now under way are not to be delayed pending the President's decision.

3. *AK-47 Ammunition*. The WSAG was informed that 7,000,000 rounds of ammunition, which will serve to meet immediate Cambodian requirements, will be available shortly from Indonesia.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

37. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, September 12, 1970.

SUBJECT

Instruction to Ambassador Bunker Regarding the Vietnam Negotiating Package

Secretary Rogers has sent us the instruction to Ambassador Bunker to begin consultations with President Thieu on the package proposal. I have cleared the cable, making a number of changes cited below.²

The elements in the package. The cable, as drafted by State, asks Ambassador Bunker to tell Thieu that the package would consist of the following four interrelated proposals:

—*An internationally supervised, standstill cease-fire throughout all Indochina*. According to State, the following conditions would apply:

—The cease-fire would not be an end in itself, but part of a larger effort to end the war.

—We will insist on a halt to infiltration for troop reinforcements, but would permit continued rotation and logistics.

—We would consider the ICC, as presently established, to be inadequate, but—rather than eliminate it entirely—we would concentrate on having it improved or supplemented by Asian observers. We would also expect some joint commissions of belligerents.

—*An immediate, unconditional release of all POW's held by both sides*. State believes that this will give Thieu more trouble than any other pro-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 124, Vietnam Subject Files, President's Vietnam Speech 10/6/70, Drafts and Game Plan. Top Secret; Nodis; Cherokee. Sent for information.

² The final text was sent in telegram 149946 to Saigon, September 13. (Ibid.)

vision in the package, but says that we regard it as an essential ingredient. We might be prepared to moderate the universality of the proposal, but must insist on release of all Americans.

—*An acceptance in principle that U.S. armed forces will be withdrawn from the Indochina states.* State says that in this you will be restating the position you have taken earlier. But, the cable says, it will be clear that we will not link this statement either with mutual withdrawal or with Vietnamization. In short, according to State, we will leave the impression that we would be prepared to make our withdrawal plans more concrete in connection with other elements in the package. We would be prepared to enter negotiations with the North Vietnamese, if they are interested, on the timetable and scope of U.S. withdrawals. But Bunker may assure Thieu that we will be guided by “the need to be convinced that our undertakings were consistent with continuing security for the people of South Vietnam.”

—*An expanded international conference among interested parties to seek a negotiated settlement throughout Indochina.* We will indicate to Thieu that we are not prepared to pay any price for convening such a conference, and will continue the Paris talks if Hanoi declines.

Additional Points. In addition, Ambassador Bunker is asked to make the following points to Thieu:

—The package includes no proposals regarding political arrangements for South Vietnam.

—We will be making parallel approaches to Lon Nol and Souvanna Phouma.

Ambassador Bunker is also told that:

—If the consultation proceeds smoothly, we would bring Bruce home in the near future for consultations.

—You would expect to make the package proposal in late September or early October.

—To develop our plans further, we would appreciate knowing how long Bunker believes it will take him to get Thieu on board.

Comment: In effect, their draft involves unilateral withdrawal. It would mean that your statement would not be a cease-fire proposal, but a unilateral withdrawal with cease-fire attached.

Changes I have made. Accordingly, and in line with our earlier talks, I have made the following changes:

—Modified the withdrawal proposal to bring it into line with your May 14 formulations,³ while making it clear that we are talking about

³ In an address to the Nation on May 14, 1969, President Nixon outlined a proposal for mutual withdrawal from Vietnam in 12 months. The address is printed in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1969*, pp. 369–375. See also *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume VI, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Document 68.

total U.S. withdrawal and a readiness to make our withdrawal plans more concrete. I have also changed the reference to our withdrawal to make it apply to Vietnam rather than the Indochina states.

—Changed the section regarding international supervision to remove reference to possible retention of the ICC. Even if we ultimately have to do this, I see no need to reveal it at this point, particularly since it may be better for us to supervise a cease-fire unilaterally than through the ICC.

—Deleted the reference to bringing Bruce home for consultations and substituted more general language saying we will consult him in the near future.

38. Memorandum for Record Prepared by the Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Knowles)¹

Washington, September 12, 1970.

Subj: JCS Meeting, 1500 Hours, Wednesday, 9 September

1. Mr. Perot briefed the Chiefs on his efforts to obtain the release of US prisoners of war. He started out by saying his basic strategy was to put and keep pressure on the North Vietnamese on the POW question. He said it became obvious in the initial negotiations that the North Vietnamese did not understand our interest in POWs. In their eyes a POW is a disgrace. War is the real issue and not the POWs. They would not accept his position that the entire United States is interested in 1500 prisoners. It is his opinion that the North Vietnamese feel the American people do not understand the war. They are not mad at the people of the United States—just the US Government. They feel that the Americans do not do a good job of electing their leaders. In their view, a small, well organized minority rules the US, not the majority. Mr. Perot feels when the pressure we put on them become untenable, we will see results. He indicated he had his own intelligence net which he uses to get information in and out of Hanoi. He said as far as results to date are concerned, the US prisoners are now being treated better than ever before. He pointed out the film Congressman Zion had obtained was made in May of this year and not at Christmastime as ad-

¹ Source: National Archives, RG-218, Records of the Chairman, Moorer Diary, July 1970–July 1974. Top Secret.

vertised. Morale amongst the prisoners has improved. The POWs have word that their families and people in the US are trying to get them out. They get this information from new POWs and pilots recently shot down. They know their wives are organized and working hard. He pointed out the tremendous response he received from his TV appearance with Hugh Downs on the 1st of January. Indicated he has prepared a list of things that Congress can do. The replica of cells and cages over in Congress caused the North Vietnamese considerable concern. They made numerous efforts to have them taken down on the basis they were not accurate. He said he offered to send them blue prints so they could correct them. They declined the offer. He said he urged the Senators to put something together. If one of them would go to Paris, he would probably get a better film than Congressman Zion. He suggested that there should be a joint session of Congress on the subject. He felt there was a unique opportunity during the elections for those campaigning to make an appeal for the immediate release of prisoners in all camps. The North Vietnamese would not like that. Also, he was trying to get Congressmen to go to Cambodia and Laos. He said the main objective is to demonstrate the importance we place on POWs to the North Vietnamese, not to the American people. He is trying to organize now a city by city campaign and he feels this would get good results. "Already tried a pilot model at Fort Worth." This would assist in building a base of support. "Hopefully for the short term but certainly for the long term." What he will do is get each city to make up a package of letters and appeals that can be delivered to the North Vietnamese Delegates in Paris. The purpose would be for the NVN to obtain a profile of concern across America. Suggestions for the military are: (1) Brief all our people—said word will get to the prisoners of the military's concern. (2) Improve the package control system. Packages should be sent to every prisoner at every opportunity. This is terribly important. If one man doesn't get a package, the military ought to provide a package. If the military doesn't do that, let him know and he will see that they are taken care of. Another thing we should consider is some of the key NVN prisoners. The North wants them back very badly. They don't want all the prisoners—just the key ones. Consequently, the key prisoners may be the basis for some sort of exchange. Overall, he said the NVN feel confident in saying we can have a military victory any time we want one. They understand that. Admiral Moorer outlined the recent proposal made by the Joint Chiefs of Staff with regard to returning POWs. He indicated we have a problem with SVN. Must have agreement with them in order to make any proposal along these lines workable. Mr. Perot suggested they might be able to make a three-way deal. For instance, we might offer them some housing for their military people that they want very badly in exchange for some type of POW package. Another proposal which

should be looked at would be to offer to build facilities to put our men and their men in a neutral country. CNO asked if there were any problems the Chiefs could help with? Mr. Perot responded: "help inform the people of America what is going on." The people don't really know. We shield the people from the war. Many think the Ho Chi Minh Trail is a highway. Admiral Moorer commented that this is because we adopted the guns and butter approach and no mobilization. Mr. Perot said the students don't have a closed mind. They have strong emotions and lack of knowledge. If the kids would just be intellectually honest, it would help a great deal. For example, they didn't understand that the refugees in Laos fled from the North Vietnamese, not the bombing. General Palmer commented that the NVN POWs know that they are a disgrace. Consequently, he thought the idea of the neutral country was a good one. It is hard to find NVN POWs who are willing to go back. Mr. Perot pointed out that the old prisoners are very tough. Some want to rejoin their units and get back into battle. The Commandant of the Marine Corps asked what is their minimum price to get the prisoners back? Mr. Perot responded by saying "to get all our troops out." He went on to point out that there are eight of our prisoners in China. These eight men must be part of the overall POW packet.

[Omitted here is material unrelated to Vietnam.]

39. Memorandum From K. Wayne Smith of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, September 14, 1970.

SUBJECT

NSSM 99: Cambodia Strategy Study

Background

The Cambodia strategy study (at Tab A)² is completed. It is the result of three weeks of concerted effort by my staff, particularly Bob

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-47, SRG Meeting, Cambodia (NSSM 99). Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information.

² Attached but not printed is the response to NSSM 99, "US Strategy Options for Cambodia," September 13. NSSM 99 is Document 25.

Sansom, and the bureaucracy. We received full-backing at the working levels in all agencies, including several all-night sessions. The JCS, in particular, has been very helpful.

Given the time constraints, the product is, I believe, first-rate and thorough on the subject of U.S. strategy options toward the GOC. We have drawn on every source available in Washington and devised several analytical tools for examining the links between Cambodian outcomes and Vietnamization.

As a result of this process, the agencies have had ample opportunity to express their views fully. More importantly, they have been forced to analyze and defend them in detail. As a result, initial agency views have been modified, and, with one exception, it is now understood that there are several reputable options, not just State's, JCS's, etc.

The exception is the OSD option designed by Secretary Laird. Laird followed the study and consistently "gamed" his option to fit the outcome he is seeking.

Originally, Laird instructed his ISA representatives to insert an option calling for no additional assistance to Cambodia or RVNAF support whatever the consequences.

As the analysis developed and it appeared that the GOC without additional assistance and extensive RVNAF support could not survive, Laird became concerned that his option would be ignored as the straw man at the lower end of the NSSM 99 options spectrum.

These fears apparently caused Laird to add several ingredients to his option in an attempt to obscure its essential characteristics. He inserted the stipulation that his option did *not preclude* ARVN support for the GOC but gave verbal orders via ISA ("not to be put in print" according to the ISA representative) that it was his view that no U.S. financial or combat and logistics support would be provided if ARVN did intervene.

The Secretary is probably aware of State's assessment that the GVN would not go to the GOC's rescue unless it had U.S. backing.

Meanwhile, the State Department had been supporting the Laird option. State openly spoke of a Laird-Rogers golf course agreement that Cambodia's fate should be of little concern to the U.S. Laird ordered that his option limit FY 71 funding to the \$40 million already provided. However, State does not share Laird's spending habits and is prepared to give the GOC up to \$100 million if a supplemental can be obtained. (Despite his consistent guidance during preparation of the Cambodia paper, Laird has just come in with a recommendation that "now is the time" for the President to seek a \$260 million MAP supplemental for Korea, Cambodia, Turkey, Republic of China and Greece. He believes the Congress will act before October 15th because the situation in

Southeast Asia is favorable and the U.S. decision to redeploy troops from Korea has had a favorable impact. I will complete action on the latest Laird memorandum as soon as possible.)

State was concerned that there be a reputable option in the paper that provides support to the GOC but which does not risk permanent RVNAF involvement to defend the GOC. Such GVN involvement would couple Cambodia's fate with Vietnamization and indirectly commit the U.S. to the preservation of the GOC. State first inserted a strong refutation of the Laird-modified minimum assistance strategy, saying that OSD's interpretation failed to face up to the basic issue: should or should not RVNAF be employed to defend Cambodia?

After realizing that Laird was moving in all directions at once, State withdrew its support and criticism of his option and inserted its own (Strategy 2) which provides for a \$100 million supplement to assist the GOC and precludes permanent RVNAF involvement in the defense of Cambodia except for cross-border options. (The JCS then inserted a rebuttal to Laird's option arguing that it did not provide the resources for what it claimed to accomplish—page 25).

The Strategies

There are a total of four strategies in the paper:

—*Strategy 1: A Minimum Resources Strategy* (OSD's option) that deems the GOC non-essential to Vietnamization and precludes RVNAF defense of the GOC (or with Laird's caveat does not preclude RVNAF involvement but prohibits U.S. support for it.) No additional U.S. military assistance would be provided to the GOC although \$45 million in available economic assistance would be provided.

—*Strategy 2: A Limited Resource/Involvement Strategy* (State's preference) which deems the preservation of the GOC non-essential to Vietnamization, precludes (unequivocally) RVNAF involvement to defend the GOC (as opposed to cross-border operations), but calls for an additional \$100 million in U.S. economic and military assistance to give the GOC the chance to go it alone.

—*Strategy 3: A Defense of a Viable GOC Strategy* which uses RVNAF as necessary to defend GOC on territory ranging from one-fifth to one-half of Cambodia depending on the variant chosen. This option can be defended either from a judgment that the preservation of the GOC is essential to Vietnamization success (the JCS view) or that it is beneficial to Vietnamization even with some RVNAF involvement in Cambodia (my view).

—*Strategy 4: Offensive Operations in South Laos and Northern Cambodia could be conducted as part of a strategy to defend Cambodia.* Logically, this option is not an alternative to the three preceding options

but could be complementary to any of them. It was inserted by the JCS, at the insistence of General Westmoreland. The VSSG Working Group agreed that the option merits detailed consideration, particularly as a result of the new evidence on the logistic importance of Sihanoukville, and so recommends in the paper. This could be done as part of the follow-on on NSSM 99 Southeast Asia strategy study or as a separate task. In any case, there are many questions that need to be answered. I will raise them in your talking points.

The Analysis

A surprising amount of analysis was done for this paper. For example, the force structures associated with each option and GOC economic assistance requirement estimates are based on relatively sophisticated models put together in a very short time period.

In addition, the paper attempts to shed light on the considerations that might lead one to choose one of the options over the others. Three findings stand out:

—(1) Based largely on the post-March 18th³ performance of FANK, it was judged that without RVNAF ground force assistance, NVA/VC forces now in Cambodia could probably over-run the GOC if they make a determined effort in the upcoming dry season. This suggests that Strategy 1 risks the downfall of the GOC. So does Strategy 2 unless the enemy is deterred by possible RVNAF intervention even if the U.S. does not plan to encourage or support such intervention.

—(2) The present situation in Cambodia benefits Vietnamization and pacification in South Vietnam more than the pre-March 18th situation. This conclusion emerges from an analysis of the *force diversion effects* of Cambodia put together by my staff with help from OSD/Systems Analysis. Before March 18th the friendly-to-enemy force ratio in MR 3 and MR 4 was 2.16 to 1. Yet the same ratio of RVNAF to NVA/VC forces in Cambodia is 1.40 to 1. Because with few exceptions the enemy's forces now targeted against Cambodia were diverted from South Vietnam, this means that the residual friendly-to-enemy force ratio in South Vietnam has risen in the GVN's favor from 2.16 to 1 to 2.30 to 1. That GVN control in the border provinces has risen by 10% compared to 6% for the non-border provinces since March 1970 is probably evidence that these force diversion effects have helped pacification.

³ On March 18, Lon Nol and Sirik Matak led a successful coup against the government of Prince Sihanouk.

Which option is most consistent with the continuation of these circumstances?

—If the GOC falls, a likelihood for Strategy 1 and a possibility for Strategy 2 if the enemy mounts a determined attack, the enemy will be able to redeploy most of his combat forces toward Vietnam whereas ARVN will probably have to devote more forces to cross border operations.

—On the other hand, for Strategy 3, its higher variants would require more RVNAF forces to hold territory in Cambodia and thus lessen or completely remove the force diversion benefit of sustaining Cambodia. However, the lower variant to Strategy 2 would maintain the present advantage.

—(3) The South Laos logistics capacity of the enemy is probably sufficient to allow an adequate total supply input to reach Cambodia from North Vietnam. But the enemy will have to pay a higher price to transport the additional 25 tons per day through South Laos that he formerly shipped through Sihanoukville. This could require 12,000 or more additional troops and he would lose more supplies to allied air and interdiction. This finding compels us to re-examine the South Laos interdiction issue and consider options for increased air and ground interdiction.

More important perhaps is the difficulty the enemy will have in distributing his supplies forward to his troops.

These results do not favor any particular option because all call for cross-border operations, the primary factor limiting enemy forward supply and distribution efforts.

Aside from these major analytical findings, the paper generally conveys the view that the fall of Phnom Penh would be a serious political and psychological blow to the U.S. The more weight one gives to this the more one would favor the higher strategies.

Making a Choice

If you believe the fate of Cambodia will have no important impact on Vietnamization's future, then you choose Strategy 1.

If, however, you believe there are limited military and political benefits to Vietnamization from sustaining the GOC, but that it is too dangerous to link Vietnamization and Cambodia's fate by committing RVNAF to defending the GOC, then you could choose Strategy 2 and provide additional assistance, i.e., keep RVNAF out and accept the consequences.

If you believe there are *limited* military and political benefits to Vietnamization from sustaining the GOC and recognize that some RVNAF commitment and additional assistance is required, then you

favor the lower variants of Strategy 3 because they require the least RVNAF commitment to Cambodia.

If you believe that the preservation of the GOC is *essential* to Vietnamization, then you favor the high variants of Strategy 3, give the GOC the most assistance it can absorb and prepare to make whatever RVNAF commitment is required.

My View

My own view is that there are limited benefits to sustaining the GOC and that it is wishful thinking to believe as Strategy 2 (and State) does that FANK can successfully cope with seasoned NVA/VC troops without RVNAF help of more than the rescue variety. Moreover, we have already committed some degree of U.S. prestige to Cambodia, and the \$100–\$200 million more called for to give the GOC some chance of coping with NVA/VC forces is peanuts compared with the billions already spent in South Vietnam.

However, in going for Strategy 3, *I believe the potential disadvantageous force diversion effects of the higher variants should be recognized and a ceiling placed on RVNAF involvement.* The JCS, which supports the highest variant to Strategy 3, does not want to face up to the essential cost in RVNAF forces of defending all of Cambodia now controlled by the GOC. The most reasonable ceiling would be to limit RVNAF involvement to the key southeast enclave to be defended in the low variant of Strategy 3. However, this variant does not leave open the possibility that GOC forces could succeed in defending the key land route to Battambang and Thailand to the west. Thus, this ceiling on RVNAF should be combined with the assistance to the GOC called for in the variant 2 of Strategy 3.

Funding

The funding situation is not as bleak as we had been led to believe. The new support requirements for the GOC are (in millions of \$):

	Economic Support	Military	Total
Strategy 1	\$ 45	\$ 0	\$ 45
Strategy 2 and Strategy 3, variant 1	60	40	100
Strategy 3, variant 2	125	50	175
Strategy 3, variant 3	100	125	225

The bureaucracy will make every effort to argue that nothing can be done without supplementals. Secretary Laird has already taken this position. Without a supplemental he wants to wash his hands of Cambodia. (He may even want to do so even though he is recommending a supplemental.)

It is clear we could fund at least variant 1 of Strategy 3 without a supplemental and possibly variant 2 as well.⁴ Variant 3 of Strategy 2 will almost certainly require a supplemental.

Whatever strategy is selected, you should ask OMB to develop at least two funding options:

—one with a supplemental.

—one without.

Then the President will be free to choose for himself how he wants to proceed. Defense and State (with the mandatory supplemental with Strategy 2) want a supplemental to ease the pain of restructuring current programs. But this may not be necessary.

If both courses of action are spelled out for the option selected, the Administration can proceed to fund the option it selects through restructuring and then later, if it is judged feasible, it can seek a supplemental. Then if the supplemental fails in early 1971, it can still fund the strategy by restructuring.

Accompanying Political Actions

There is a separate section in the paper on accompanying political actions. I believe it is superficial and should be ignored. State persists in wanting to lecture us on diplomatic and political moves as if we were undergraduates. We made several attempts to force State to be analytical. Hopefully, we will have better luck on the Southeast Asia portion of the study.

⁴ In the margin to the left of this paragraph, Kissinger wrote, "Why?"

40. Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Senior Review Group¹

Washington, September 15, 1970, 4:12–5 p.m.

SUBJECT

Short-Term Cambodia Strategy (NSSM 99)

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Dr. Henry A. Kissinger	JCS
State	Adm. Thomas H. Moorer
Mr. U. Alexis Johnson	B/Gen. Robert Lukeman
Mr. Marshall Green	NSC Staff
Mr. Arthur Hartman	Dr. K. Wayne Smith
Defense	Mr. John H. Holdridge
Mr. David Packard	Col. Richard T. Kennedy
Vice Adm. William Flanagan	Capt. Robert Sansom
CIA	Mr. D. Keith Guthrie
Mr. Richard Helms	OMB
Mr. George Carver	Mr. James R. Schlesinger

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. The SRG agreed that from a military standpoint, Strategy 3, Variant 3, as outlined in the VSSG Working Paper,² states the preferred objective, which is to maintain the Cambodian Government in control of the half of the country that includes the capital, populated areas, and port. The SRG also agreed that in seeking to achieve this objective, the US should aim at building up the capabilities of the Cambodian forces so as to minimize the need for significant long-term intervention by the ARVN. The SRG noted that the requirement for involvement of South Vietnamese forces in the defense of Cambodia should decline as the capabilities of the Cambodian forces improve.

2. To provide a fuller analysis of the implications of the strategic objectives outlined in Paragraph 1, the NSC Staff will prepare in chart form an analysis covering the next six months which relates the expected increase in Cambodian military capabilities, the likely levels of NVA/VC reinforcements in Cambodia, and the requirements for employment of South Vietnamese forces in the defense of Cambodia. CIA will assist in assessing prospective NVA/VC reinforcement levels, and

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-111, SRG Minutes, Originals, 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House.

² See Document 39 and footnote 2 thereto.

JCS will provide data on prospects for the improvement of Cambodian military capabilities.³

3. State and OMB will prepare a study on means to fund a Cambodian assistance program at the current level pending passage of a supplemental appropriation or in default of passage of such an appropriation. The study should also define the amount which should be requested to support the objectives referred to in Paragraph 1 if it is decided to seek a supplemental appropriation early in CY71.

4. The SRG endorsed the suggestion that the Secretary of Defense provide the President his views on why he believes it would be possible to obtain a supplemental appropriation for military assistance to Cambodia prior to the adjournment of Congress on October 23.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

³ In a September 19 memorandum to Packard, Johnson, and Helms, Kissinger requested that they expand the NSSM 99 response to include an option that would allow Cambodian forces to defend the area outlined in variant 3 of Strategy 3 without “significant long term intervention by South Vietnamese.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-173, NSSM Files, NSSM 99)

41. Editorial Note

On September 17, 1970, at a plenary meeting of the Paris Peace Talks on Vietnam, the Provisional Revolutionary Government’s (PRG) representative to the talks, Madame Nguyen Thi Binh, presented an “Eight-Point Clarification of the Ten-Point Overall Solution” to the war in Vietnam. The text is printed in Council on Foreign Relations, Stebbins and Adam (eds.), *Documents on American Foreign Relations, 1970*, pages 192–196. Henry Kissinger, the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs, called President Richard Nixon at 9:45 a.m. on September 17 with an initial analysis of the proposal and related issues. The two also briefly discussed the administration’s effort to dissuade Major General Nguyen Cao Ky, Vice President of the Republic of Vietnam, from making his planned trip to the United States in October:

“K: Okay. About Vietnam, the Viet Cong have made some proposals today that are still not in acceptable form to us but do conform to what they said to me. If we were to promise withdrawal by June 30, they say they would stop military action against them. It’s a sort of half-baked cease-fire proposal; it means they would give up their 6-month deadline. Also they are not saying they will deal with any Saigon

government that doesn't include Thieu, Ky and Khiem. We still have the problem that you identified but before they said they wouldn't negotiate with anybody. They just may not be able to make a proposal we can accept.

"P: And they may be waiting for their meeting with you.

"K: That's right. But they are confirming publicly what they told me privately—so they weren't just stringing me along.

"P: Let's keep waiting a little while.

"K: Yes, the 7th of October is still three weeks from now, and the Middle East will blunt the headlines on this.

"P: That's right.

"K: Finally, Bunker talked with Ky, offering him a dinner, and said he thinks Ky will finally agree not to come.

"P: That just postpones it." (Transcript of Telephone Conversation; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 6, Chronological File)

In a follow-up conversation at 9:30 p.m., September 17, Kissinger and the President briefly discussed the former's upcoming trip to Paris to meet with Ambassador David Bruce, United States Representative to the Paris Peace Talks:

"P: What about what the Viet Cong said in Paris? Do you think there is a change?

"K: It is small sign. They have extended the period of withdrawal that they said to meet. Might want to only talk about withdrawal to us and military [withdrawal] to Saigon. That is what we want. That is what I have to clarify on the 27th. The fact that they presented a proposal is good. I got a letter from Bruce. Very intellectual letter in reply to my minutes of the meeting which I sent to him.

"P: Understood it, did he?

"K: Yes. He is willing to bore others as they are boring him. He is a fine fellow. Very good.

"P: He is the best man we have had over there so far." (Ibid.)

42. Memorandum From John H. Holdridge of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, September 21, 1970.

SUBJECT

A New Estimate of Communist Supplies Delivered Through Sihanoukville

CIA has issued a memorandum revealing new evidence on the delivery of Communist military supplies to Sihanoukville from December 1966 through April 1969 (Tab A).² In short, this evidence indicates that at least 22,000 tons of military equipment reached the port during this period, an amount far higher than previously estimated. (In March of this year, CIA estimated a total of about 11,800 tons.)

CIA notes that this must be considered a preliminary figure, since all the new evidence has not yet been analyzed. At present, there are two important loose ends. The 22,000 tons is based on deliveries made by nine Chinese ships; it is possible that there were additional ships, in which case the total will be even higher. On the other hand, the Cambodians retained some of this material for themselves (probably about ten per cent), and this must be deducted before the total amount actually reaching the VC/NVA can be calculated. Because of the mass of documents involved, it will probably be at least a month before a firm total is produced.

Comment. The new evidence was obtained recently in Phnom Penh, and is solid. It is a virtually complete Cambodian record of the delivery and distribution of Communist supplies. It contains not only bills of lading and packing lists from the Chinese ships, but detailed inventories and destinations of the truck convoys which delivered the supplies to the VC/NVA near the South Vietnamese border. A quick look at the material indicates that there were some 10–20 of these delivery points along the border, and it may be that some additional caches near the border could be uncovered by searching the immediate areas. We understand that CIA is planning to send this information to the field as soon as it can be assembled.

Aside from revealing the inadequacy of previous estimates of Communist supplies arriving at Sihanoukville, the new evidence also

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 511, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. X, September 1–October 31, 1970. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. The memorandum was initialed by Kissinger.

² Attached but not printed.

poses a thorny intelligence problem. In effect, the Communists received far more military equipment through Sihanoukville than previously believed. This raises the question of where the extra material is now. There are really only two possibilities. It may be cached in Cambodia and South Vietnam. If so, the Communists' immediate logistical problems caused by the cross border operations would be diminished. The other possibility is that the Communists have been consuming a greater amount of military supplies than previously estimated. If this is the case, then the loss of Sihanoukville would be an even greater blow to the Communists.

We understand that CIA plans to re-evaluate its approach to the entire question of Communist logistics, including rates of consumption. This will probably be a long process, but the results should give us a better understanding of what may have happened to the unaccounted supplies.

43. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, September 22, 1970.

SUBJECT

A Longer Look at the New Communist Peace Proposal on Vietnam

Further study of the full text of the new Communist peace proposal (Tab A)² confirms the initial impressions which I reported to you yesterday and adds some others.³

Essentially, the proposal does the following things:

—It gives the Communists not just a negotiating platform, but a better vehicle for political and propaganda operations against us and

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 189, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, 1 July 70–Sep 70. Secret; Nodis; Paris Meetings. Sent for information. Holdridge forwarded this memorandum to Kissinger under a September 18 covering memorandum and recommended that he sign it. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² Tab A, "Binh's Eight Point Proposal of September 17," is attached but not printed. See Document 41.

³ Kissinger's September 17 memorandum to Nixon, with his initial analysis of the proposal, is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 189, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, 1 July 70–Sep 70.

against the South Vietnamese Government. In fact, it could be designed to serve the Communist cause even more if there were no negotiations than if there were some.

—It was obviously timed to impact on our elections.

—It focuses great pressure against the GVN.

—It toughens the Communist position on several issues, largely by making it more specific.

—It appears intended to tempt us to state a deadline for our pull-out and to deal with the NLF, particularly on prisoner matters.

—It also offers some room for exploration, but it contains no real breakthrough on any issue.

General Strategic Purpose. Mme. Binh's proposal may be regarded as part of Hanoi's effort to counter the Vietnamization policy.

—It gives the Communists a long-range political platform with which they can hope to maximize political pressures in the U.S. and South Vietnam and thus counter the effects of our current policies in both places.

—We doubt that Hanoi expects a favorable response from us on its new proposal. But it may hope for a favorable response from U.S. public opinion or from South Vietnamese anti-government politicians. In that case, Hanoi may hope that our side will eventually be forced to accept its terms even though the new program does not point to any opening for a rapid settlement.

—Our impression that the new program envisages the possibility of no general negotiated settlement is strengthened by its failure to mention the Geneva Accords, which had been cited frequently in the ten points.

Some Hardening. The new program hardens the Communist position in several ways, sometimes simply by making it more specific:

—It categorically excludes dealing with Thieu-Ky-Khiem and it attacks them sharply, which the earlier ten points had not done.⁴

—It states that the formation of a "provisional coalition government" is "indispensable" to organizing truly free elections.

—It is more specific on the possible composition of such a "provisional coalition," arranging it in a "troika" which would emasculate the organized anti-Communist forces.

—It states clearly that "implementing the modalities" of a cease-fire must await complete settlement. There is some ambiguity here,

⁴ See footnote 2, Document 35.

since the program implies a cease-fire toward U.S. forces as soon as they begin withdrawing or even announce their intention to withdraw, but it is clear that the Communists would then focus their fire on the ARVN.

—It gives a deadline for U.S. withdrawal, which the ten points had not done, but the deadline provides for nine months and is thus more generous than Mme. Binh's earlier six-months proposal (which was not part of the ten points).

Easier on U.S. in Some Ways. On the other hand, the proposal is less assertive than the earlier ten points in some matters regarding the United States. It conveys the impression that we could get out easily if we were not concerned about what happened later:

—It specifically concentrates its demands regarding the U.S. in the first clause, thus telling us that we can quickly and painlessly extricate ourselves from Vietnam if we will only do the thing listed in the clause, i.e., set a withdrawal date.

—The POW issue, which the ten points had relegated to the "aftermath" of the war, is related directly to our announcement of a withdrawal date.⁵

—There is no demand for reparations (though these could, as in the case of the ten points, be brought up in negotiations on POW's).

—There is no assertion in the new program that we must "renounce" Thieu-Ky-Khiem, as the Communists have frequently demanded (although unilateral withdrawal would amount to the same thing).

—There is no demand like the one in the ten points for international supervision of U.S. withdrawals.

Possibilities for Exploration. There are also some possibilities for exploration, although they may not offer us very much:

—Lengthening the withdrawal period further.

—The new program speaks of an agreement on "implementation," which could leave room for placing our own demands about Communist reciprocity.

—The new program still calls for talks on the matter of "Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam" (a euphemism for Northern forces in

⁵ Secretary Laird sent a September 18 memorandum to Kissinger and Rogers noting this change in the North Vietnamese position on U.S. POWs and recommended having Bruce request an amplification of the proposal in a private discussion, at which he would stress that the United States would consider North Vietnamese willingness to settle the issue a sign of their good intentions. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 189, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, 1 July 70–Sep 70)

the South), though it still remains unclear with whom Hanoi would be prepared to discuss this.

Appeal to South Vietnamese. The new program also appears designed to appeal to South Vietnamese politicians who are against the GVN, as well as to the discontented urban and rural elements in South Vietnam:

—It takes a somewhat softer line on unification than the ten points.

—It lists the evils of the Thieu-Ky-Khiem administration at greater length than the ten points, and promises to rectify them.

—It shows more clearly than earlier Communist statements that the “provisional coalition government” would have lots of openings for persons opposed to the GVN, and also has more material on the “freedom” of elections run by the coalition.

—Like earlier proposals, it promises that there will be no reprisals.

—It thus conveys the impression that South Vietnam’s politicians could get along with the Communists if they would just get rid of three men.

“Fight-Talk” Possibility. It remains to be seen whether the Communists will be prepared to engage us in any dialogue on the new program, and also whether they will attempt to back it up with any military action in the field.⁶

⁶ In an October 13 memorandum to Nixon, Kissinger wrote that the PRG would likely use Binh’s proposal to launch a political and diplomatic offensive aimed at toppling the GVN leadership. (Ibid., Box 149, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam 1 Oct. 70)

44. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, September 24, 1970.

SUBJECT

Ambassador Bunker's Conversations with President Thieu on our Ceasefire "Package"

Ambassador Bunker has now had two conversations with President Thieu regarding our upcoming package proposal for a cease-fire in Vietnam,² and he has found that Thieu is in general agreement with what we wish to do.

During the latest conversation,³ President Thieu made the following points:

—He felt that we should make a package of our four proposals (cease-fire, withdrawals, release of POW's, and an international conference). But we should indicate that we were prepared to discuss the issues separately.

—He assumed that we would be prepared to discuss the mechanics of cease-fire—including supervision—with the other side.

—He commented that the exchange of POW's would be the subject of reciprocity, and should not be used for bargaining on political issues.

—He understands that it is a non-starter to put withdrawal in the framework of mutual withdrawal, but said that a negotiated settlement would necessarily involve the withdrawal of non-South Vietnamese forces (including North Vietnamese) from the Indochinese countries.

—He thought negotiations might be of two kinds: preliminary, which would include the interested countries; and final, which would include additional countries who could undertake to guarantee the peace.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 119, Vietnam Subject Files, Viet-Cherokee-9/70. Secret; Sensitive; Cherokee. Sent for information. The President initialed the memorandum.

² See Document 37. In telegram 15009 from Saigon, September 15, Bunker reported the first conversation, noting that Thieu claimed that he and Ky believed the "time might be appropriate to advance proposals," but neither believed "the chances of acceptance by the other side were good." Thieu asked to have until the September 18 "to think through the implications of our proposals." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 119, Vietnam Subject Files, Viet-Cherokee-9/70)

³ Bunker reported on this conversation in telegram 15282 from Saigon, September 20, which Smyser forwarded to Kissinger on September 21. (Ibid.)

—He envisaged that internal political problems in each country would be handled by the parties directly concerned, later to be brought to an international conference for overall settlement.

—He said he would be ready to discuss further details at any time, and he asked about the timing of our proposal.

Thieu commented that Mme. Binh's statement⁴ was designed in part to put the Viet Cong to the forefront in the negotiations, and to embarrass us in our elections. He thought we should try to keep her on the defensive until we made our own proposals, perhaps, for example, by stating that the POW issue should be discussed on the basis of reciprocity and on humanitarian grounds and not tied to withdrawals.

Through a special and sensitive source Mr. Helms has obtained a report on a private conversation Thieu had before his meeting with Ambassador Bunker. In that conversation, Thieu said the following:

—That he did not wish to be left out of any U.S. initiative, but also that he did not wish to make one himself because he had promised the Vietnamese to make no more proposals until the other side responded.

—South Vietnamese political affairs could not be discussed as part of this package, but should be handled separately, though the Communists would want to discuss such matters as POW's only when there was a political settlement.

—If the Communists asked for the withdrawal of South Vietnamese forces from Cambodia, the GVN could say that they would leave when it was no longer necessary for them to be there (i.e., when the Communist forces had left).

⁴ See Document 43.

45. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, September 28, 1970.

SUBJECT

My September 27 Meeting with the North Vietnamese²

My four and one half hour meeting with Xuan Thuy and Mai Van Bo was thoroughly unproductive and we adjourned without setting a new date.

After listening to Xuan Thuy's opening statement and his answers to my questions it was clear that there was no reason to continue the channel at this time. His presentation of Madame Binh's eight point proposal and responses to my probing revealed little or nothing that could not have been expressed in other channels. As I have told him on previous occasions and reinforced with your hand-written comments on my September 23 memorandum,³ this sort of session is not worth the time of the President's Assistant.

Accordingly, I had no choice but to suggest that we discontinue this channel until either side had something to say to the other. We agreed that the two sides would maintain contact in the other two forums, i.e. the public sessions and possible private meetings between Xuan Thuy and Ambassador Bruce.

What Was New or Significant

The problem with the meeting was precisely the fact that there was very little that was new. The major information that emerged was a better picture of the eight points. You will recall my memorandum to you on Madame Binh's proposal⁴ in which I said it was an open question whether it was a genuine negotiating move or essentially a prop-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 853, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David, Vol. VI. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only.

² A memorandum of conversation is *ibid.*, Box 1039, Files for the President—Vietnam Negotiations, HAK I, July 1969–September 27, 1970.

³ Nixon wrote the following remarks on a September 23 memorandum from Kissinger: "I would only suggest that I would try to get sooner at the heart of the question—Do they mean business—or is this just another rehash? Make it clear at the outset that I have instructed that unless *real* progress is made in this session, we will discontinue the channel." (*Ibid.*, Box 853, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David, Sensitive, Vol. VI)

⁴ Document 43.

aganda ploy. This meeting made it quite evident that at least for the time being the purpose is the latter. Xuan Thuy gave little on the military issues and was very unyielding on political questions. The North Vietnamese will probably try to rally public opinion around the argument that only three men—Thieu, Ky, and Khiem—stand in the way of peace, when in fact they are aiming at disarming the organized non-Communist forces by reserving the right to choose the leaders they find acceptable.

The other significant points of the meeting included the following:

—Xuan Thuy confirmed that they continue to want to discuss military and political issues together. This was our understanding, but the eight points were somewhat ambiguous on this, so I probed for reconfirmation.

—After some fencing, he made it clear that Madame Binh's June 30 deadline, while a target for them, does represent movement to a nine month withdrawal schedule.

—However, he presented a proposed timetable for our withdrawals which would have us remove 60,000 in each of the first six months—this in effect is close to a six month proposal as it represents a withdrawal of 360,000 out of the 384,000 that will remain as of October 15. While I don't believe their position is frozen, their opening gambit was indicative of their mood.

—Nevertheless, I don't believe this specific withdrawal schedule is a major issue if we could put the rest of the settlement together.

I made it clear that we will expect other non-South Vietnamese forces to withdraw as well as our own but received no response on this beyond their standard position, Madame Binh's second point, "The question of Vietnamese armed forces in South Vietnam shall be resolved by the Vietnamese parties among themselves."

—When I asked him if the cease-fire relating to withdrawal of U.S. forces would also apply to South Vietnamese troops, Xuan Thuy confirmed this in his usual backhanded way. He indicated that if all other forces stopped fighting there would be no need for the Communist forces to continue to fight, and they would discuss this as part of a general settlement.

—I dropped my prepared statement and concentrated on asking questions and setting the record straight. During my probing he generally resorted to dialectics and debating tactics and showed no give.

—During the last ten minutes, when it was clear that I was going to break off the channel for the time being, he said a few concrete things, the most interesting being his indication that the composition of the coalition government would be negotiated. However, there was nothing to justify maintaining the channel at this time.

—Per your instructions I emphasized our concern about prisoners of war and said that I have not pressed the problem in this channel because we consider it a humanitarian issue, not one where our men can be used as hostages.⁵

Conclusion

I believe that we should suspend this channel until such time as they come to us or we might decide we want to try a totally different tack.

We gain nothing by breaking off altogether. They seemed somewhat taken aback when I moved to shelve the talks and were prepared to continue them. Their personal behavior was more cordial than ever. My suspicion is that they are not ready to move yet, but that we just might be seeing the next to last round. If they do decide to move we could see rapid progress.

In retrospect they were forthcoming at our previous meeting on September 7⁶ either because they are confused; or they wanted to provide a genial framework for us to show the maximum reception to their eight points; or they are simply eager to maintain the channel for fall-back reasons.

The possibility that the North Vietnamese are genuinely confused was borne out by a talk that I had with Jean Paul Sainteny later in the afternoon.⁷ He said that they are in an undecided state, more so than he had ever seen them. They project a Micawber-like mood of waiting and hoping something good will turn up.

⁵ Nixon wrote the following on the last page of Kissinger's September 23 memorandum: "Plus prisoner issue—to be considered separately as indication of their desire for peaceful settlement." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 853, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David, Sensitive, Vol. VI)

⁶ See Documents 34 and 35.

⁷ A September 27 memorandum of conversation between Kissinger and Sainteny is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 853, For the President's Files—Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. VI.

46. Editorial Note

On the evening of October 7, 1970, in a televised address from the Oval Office, President Richard Nixon proposed a "major new initiative for peace" in Vietnam. Plans for the initiative had been closely held

within the administration. In an October 6 memorandum to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry Kissinger, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird recommended a number of last minute changes to the President's speech, many of which were incorporated into the version the President ultimately delivered. In addition, Laird called Kissinger the next day, concerned about the lack of a reference to the successes of Vietnamization. According to a transcript of their conversation, they had the following exchange:

"L: I didn't bring this matter up with the President because he seemed to be clear on it when he said about making progress in VN. I am concerned about the speech tonight—to get something in early in the speech that this new initiative was made possible by Vietnamization program. You have to make some reference to this or they will say why didn't you do this a year ago.

"K: Let me see where we can put it in.

"L: It's important because some people would say why didn't we do it a year ago.

"K: A good point. I will look at the speech." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 7, Chronological File)

In his address, the President outlined five proposals, including a cease-fire-in-place without preconditions, which would "encompass not only the fighting in Vietnam but in all of Indochina," be "part of a general move to end the war in Indochina," and be "effectively supervised by international observers." He acknowledged the difficulty of achieving this aim "in a guerrilla war where there are no frontlines," but pledged that "our side is ready to stand still and cease firing." He cautioned that any cease-fire should not be "the means by which either side builds up its strength," and should end "all kinds of warfare. This covers the full range of actions that have typified this war, including bombing and acts of terror." The second proposal was for an international "Indochina Peace Conference," based upon "the essential elements of the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962." Third, Nixon explained the readiness of the United States to "negotiate an agreed timetable for complete withdrawals [of troops] as part of an overall settlement." His fourth proposal called for "a political solution that reflects the will of the South Vietnamese people," and the "existing relationship of political forces." While he pledged that the United States would abide by whatever political process the parties chose, he noted that the other side was demanding "the right to exclude whomever they wish from government," which was "patently unreasonable." The final proposal, which he described as a "simple act of humanity" and a means to establish North Vietnamese good faith, was for the "immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of war held by both

sides." In closing, the President put his initiative in a broader perspective. Citing an existing cease-fire in the Middle East, he posited that if one could also be achieved in Indochina, "we could have some reason to hope that we had reached the beginning of the end of war in this century" and could be on the "threshold of a generation of peace." The full text is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pages 825–828.

After the speech, Kissinger called the President to congratulate him. They also analyzed the role of the Cambodian operation in March 1970:

"K: Incidentally, George Shultz said, coming back from Vietnam, he has learned without Cambodia we would be dead.

"P: Right. He and Ehrlichman both. Ehrlichman said Cambodia was the big thing. Listen, Henry, Cambodia won the war.

"K: I think we have them on the defensive.

"P: What did Dobrynin say?

"K: I did not talk to him. I just sent it to him in an envelope.

"P: I was playing a little dumb on that today. You ought to call Dobrynin on it—say, look don't be foolish, this is a great step forward. Generation of peace, don't you think that is a good line?

"K: Right. It made all headlines each time you used it. You made a major step forward again.

"P: As you know, I don't think cease-fire is worth a damn, but now that we have done it we are looking down their throats." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 7, Chronological File)

The North Vietnamese response to the President's speech was overwhelmingly negative. In an October 15 memorandum to the President, Kissinger noted that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's Foreign Ministry issued an official statement claiming that "the Vietnamese people and the Government of the DRV sternly condemn and categorically reject the deceptive 'peace' proposal made by the Nixon Administration." (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 190, Paris Talks/Meetings, 1 Oct 70–Dec 70)

Planning and Decisions for Operations in Cambodia and Laos, October 9, 1970– February 7, 1971

47. Letter From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Chief of the Delegation to the Peace Talks on Vietnam (Bruce)¹

Washington, October 9, 1970.

Dear David:

The meeting in Ireland with you and Phil went very well and was extremely valuable in preparing for the President's speech.²

There was one item in the President's talking points for that meeting that did not come up but that he has asked me to pass on to you. The President is very emphatic that his new initiative is not designed to be a cover for unilateral American withdrawal. Although our position on withdrawal is phrased somewhat differently in the speech, this is essentially for packaging reasons and is not meant to get us away from the basic principles of his May 14, 1969 speech.³ He hopes you will make this point clear to Phil and the delegation, for it will be most important that we all speak with one voice while following up the President's proposals during the coming weeks.

I had already drafted the above when my concern on this point was heightened by seeing the report of today's press briefing by our spokesman in Paris in which he did not make clear what the President really meant. I can understand his reticence and his view that any interpretation of the speech come primarily from here. Nevertheless, it is important that we should all be on the record in affirming that the President does not mean unilateral withdrawal.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 190, Paris Talks/Meetings, 1 Oct–Dec 70. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Lord sent a draft of this letter to Kissinger under cover of an October 7 memorandum, noting it was "redone & amplified per your instructions." (Ibid.)

² On October 4, the President, Rogers, and Kissinger met with Bruce and Philip Habib from 9:30 to 11:45 a.m. in Limerick, Ireland during the penultimate day of Nixon's European tour, September 27 to October 5. (Ibid., White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) For the President's speech of October 7, see Document 46.

³ See footnote 3, Document 37.

There has been some real pressure within the bureaucracy for us to trade unilateral withdrawal for a ceasefire. The President's careful phrasing on withdrawals in his speech is being used to fuel and to justify that pressure. However, in his personal briefings to the Cabinet and the Congressional leadership, the President made very clear that he is not suggesting or accepting a unilateral withdrawal, and he wanted you to know his strong views on this.

I notice that our spokesman also left some ambiguity about our policy on the removal of Thieu–Ky–Khiem. On this point also the President's position is very firm. He believes that removal of these men would be tantamount to the dismantling of the organized non-communist forces. He also believes the other side's demands reflects their awareness of this fact. Therefore, we should not suggest in any statement that the three men themselves might be negotiable, since—as you know—far more is at stake.

The President will, of course, consider seriously any proposals you have on these or any other issues in the negotiations, but did want you to know his position.

I trust that your dignified patience of these past weeks will be rewarded with some real negotiating movement now that the initiative has been launched. I wish you every success in the coming months, and we all share the view here that we have the best man possible in Paris for this crucial task.⁴

Warm regards,

Henry A. Kissinger⁵

⁴ Bunker responded to Kissinger in backchannel message 116 from Paris, October 19, stating that he had no suggestions for a change in the negotiating posture in Paris, no sympathy for trading unilateral withdrawal for a cease-fire, and no patience for those calling for the removal of Thieu, Ky, and Khiem. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 423, Backchannel Messages, Europe, Mid East, Latin America, 1970)

⁵ Kissinger signed "Henry" above his typed signature.

48. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, October 11, 1970.

SUBJECT

Announcement of Expedited Troop Withdrawals from Vietnam for Inclusion in the Presentation to the East Coast Editors, Monday, October 12, 1970

For a host of complex reasons involving manpower constraints directly linked to draft calls as well as fiscal limitations, Secretary Laird proposes to proceed with an expedited drawdown in the authorized ceiling of our forces in Vietnam between now and Christmas.² In addition to the reduction in our troop levels of 50,000 to be accomplished by October 15, Secretary Laird will reduce the authorized ceiling by another 40,000 between October 15 and December 31, 1970.

The expedited schedule does not affect the overall reduction of 150,000 by May 1 which you have already approved; it merely expedites the pace of these withdrawals between now and the end of the calendar year. Thus 90,000 of the 150,000 will be withdrawn this year, with the remaining 60,000 between January and May 1971 rather than the reverse which was originally projected.

I will send you a separate memorandum on this subject outlining the reasons for the expedited drawdown over which it now appears we have no control, and the implications which it will have between now and May 1.³

In view of the fact that we are faced with a *fait accompli* on this expedited drawdown in our troop levels it is certain that the fact of the stepped up schedule will soon become known. In fact, Secretary Laird proposed to me today that he be authorized to announce the incremental drawdown of 40,000 between October 15 and Christmas at his

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 95, Vietnam Subject Files, Viet: Troop Redeployment 1970. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for action. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² On September 17, Laird sent a proposal to Kissinger that he described as the "best balance between military requirements and manpower and budgetary constraints," adding that it was no riskier than the original plan and was endorsed by the JCS. He explained that because of sharp reductions in active duty manpower due to the 1971 budget, he could not keep to the original schedule without diverting troops from other already weakened units, principally in Europe, and that the original schedule would cost an additional \$400 million to implement, which the Defense Department could not absorb. (Ibid.)

³ Not found. In a September 22 handwritten note to Smith, Lord indicated that Kissinger "was leaning toward acquiescing in Laird's figures." (Ibid.)

Monday morning Pentagon briefing. Since this announcement will further enhance the impact of your peace initiative I believe that you should get full credit and recommend that you make the announcement tomorrow at the press briefing for East Coast editors in Hartford. I have so informed Secretary Laird and he is in full agreement.

At Tab A⁴ are talking points on this subject if you wish to treat the issue in this way. Alternatively, at Tab B⁵ is an announcement which could be read and handed out.

⁴ Tab A is attached but not printed.

⁵ Tab B is attached but not printed; the text is the same as the announcement that was released on October 12, in which the President indicated that he was accelerating the rate of withdrawal because of the "continued progress of the Vietnamization program." (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, p. 836)

49. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, October 13, 1970.

SUBJECT

Your Meeting with Sir Robert Thompson

You are meeting with Sir Robert Thompson at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, October 13.

Sir Robert has just returned from another visit to Vietnam, undertaken at our request. He has also taken a side trip to Cambodia.

Sir Robert's report to you is attached (Tab A).²

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 92, Vietnam Subject Files, Sir Robert Thompson 1970. Secret. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen." According to the President's Daily Diary, Kissinger, Nixon, and Thompson met in the Oval Office from 5:46 to 6:17 p.m. (*Ibid.*, White House Central Files) No other record of the meeting has been found.

² Attached but not printed is Tab A, an undated "Report to the President on South Vietnam" by Robert Thompson.

Sir Robert's Position. Sir Robert will probably want to make the following points:

—He is very encouraged by the situation in the countryside in South Vietnam. Progress is now slower than before because so much has already been achieved, but it is nonetheless striking in comparison with even two years ago.³

—The main force war is virtually over.

—The operations in Cambodia have materially reduced the enemy threat in the southern portions of South Vietnam, and have gained nine months to a year of time.

—Vietnamization can proceed as planned.

—Next year we should begin de-emphasizing the war and begin emphasizing programs which deal with reconstruction and development and with a return to normalcy.

—The Cambodian Government is working hard and is apparently successful in rallying the population to oppose the Viet Cong.

—Despite the progress, some important problems remain:

—The remaining Viet Cong infrastructure will take a long time to root out.

—We might be hard put if Hanoi turned down our cease-fire proposal and then next year simply announced an unsupervised stand-down in place.

—It is not certain whether the Cambodian Government will be able to conduct the kind of rural programs essential to defeating the Viet Cong in Cambodia.

—The greatest remaining problem will be to convince the South Vietnamese people that the Viet Cong are really beaten and cannot come back.

Your Position. I recommend you do the following:

—Thank Sir Robert for his second visit to Vietnam.

—Ask Sir Robert for his estimate of the situation.

—Ask Sir Robert for his estimate of the impact of our proposals in South Vietnam.

—Ask Sir Robert what he thinks we should do next to overcome the infrastructure problem and continue to make progress.

³ In a meeting with Laird and his key advisers on Vietnam, October 14, Thompson was equally sanguine about the pacification program, but indicated that there was more work to do in the traditional base areas. (Memorandum for the record by Odeen, October 14; Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330-76-67, Box 88, Viet 092, Sep-Dec 1970)

50. **Memorandum From John H. Holdridge and Richard T. Kennedy to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)**¹

Washington, October 16, 1970.

SUBJECT

Admiral Moorer's Report on Operation TAIL WIND

Admiral Moorer has sent you a report on Operation TAIL WIND (Tab A).² The operation was a reconnaissance in force to collect intelligence information in Southern Laos and took place 11–14 September 1970. It also served as a diversionary action supporting the CAS Operation Gauntlet in the Panhandle.³

Three exploitation platoons with a total of 16 U.S. and 120 indigenous personnel were inserted into the operational area by helicopter and maintained contact with the enemy for 72 hours. Friendly losses were 3 indigenous killed and 17 U.S. and 33 indigenous wounded (only 5 required hospitalization). Three helos were lost. They relied heavily on close air support. Results were excellent:

—432 enemy killed and wounded, of which 144 were killed in ground action.

—Substantial quantities of enemy ammunition were destroyed.

—A large volume of documents representing high intelligence value on the enemy transportation group in the area captured.

The operation achieved its objectives and it is representative of one of the most effective means for obtaining enemy intelligence in Southern Laos as well as of diverting NVA troops and service forces from the enemy LOC.⁴

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 548, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. VI, 12 Aug–Dec 31 '70. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. A handwritten note indicates the memorandum was "unlogged, outside system."

² Tab A, memorandum DJSM 1499–70 from the Director of the Joint Staff, General John W. Vogt, to the JCS, October 10, is attached but not printed.

³ On October 30, Kissinger sent a memorandum to the President reporting on Operation Gauntlet of mid-September in which 5,000 U.S.-directed guerillas engaged in a major interdiction effort in South Laos. They killed an estimated 600 North Vietnamese troops and wounded 500, but the operation resulted in only minimal disruption to North Vietnamese lines of communication and caused significant casualties to the guerillas and a decline in their morale and combat effectiveness. Kissinger described the operation as "an illustration of the difficulties we have to face in conducting ground operations in South Laos." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 548, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. VI, 12 Aug–Dec 31 '70)

⁴ Kissinger wrote at the bottom of the memorandum: "Write note to Moorer congratulating him."

51. Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Senior Review Group¹

Washington, October 16, 1970, 4:03–4:47 p.m.

SUBJECT

Cambodia—NSSM 99 (Part I)

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger
State—Under Secretary John Irwin
Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson
Mr. James Wilson
Mr. Arthur Hartman

Defense—Mr. David Packard
Mr. G. Warren Nutter
Rear Adm. William R. Flanagan

CIA—Lt. Gen. R. E. Cushman
Mr. Paul Walsh
[name not declassified]

JCS—Adm. Thomas H. Moorer
B/Gen. Robert P. Lukeman
Gen. Melvin Zais

OMB—Mr. James Schlesinger

AID—Mr. John Hannah
Mr. Ernest Stern

NSC Staff—Col. Richard T. Kennedy
Mr. John H. Holdridge

Dr. K. Wayne Smith
Capt. Robert L. Sansom
Mr. Dennis N. Sachs
Mr. D. Keith Guthrie

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. The Senior Review Group reaffirmed that US strategy for Cambodia should be as described in Strategy 3, Variant 3 of the VSSG Working Group paper.² The objective will be to maintain the present Cambodian Government in control of the half of the country that includes the populated area, capital, and port. The US will seek to provide the Cambodian armed forces with a light infantry capability which will to the maximum extent possible carry the burden of the country's defense, with outside assistance from South Vietnamese and possibly Thai forces as required.

2. Contingency plans will be worked out with Thailand for employment of Thai ground and air forces in the defense of Cambodia if required.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-111, Senior Review Group Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1970. Top Secret; Nodis. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House.

² For a summary of the response to NSSM 99 and a description of the strategies, see Document 39.

3. In connection with the Phase 1 assistance program to allocate \$80 million to Cambodia:

a. Issuance of a Presidential Determination to transfer \$49 million from Supporting Assistance to Cambodian MAP will proceed immediately.

b. Defense and AID will work out procedures for financing civilian and military-related economic imports, taking into account requirements for Congressional consultation, applicable legislative restrictions, and timing relative to Congressional action on the foreign aid appropriations bill and to submission of a supplemental aid appropriations bill.

c. The Office of Management and Budget will oversee implementation of the Phase 1 program.

5. AID and Defense will take all necessary steps to insure that in the event a supplemental aid appropriation is not obtained, the US will be in a position to provide assistance to Cambodia through a Section 506 drawdown³ or through a development loan.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

³ Section 506 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 granted the President special emergency authority to drawdown inventory and equipment for the Department of Defense.

52. Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, October 16, 1970, 4:47–5:35 p.m.

SUBJECT

Cambodia

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	JCS—Adm. Thomas H. Moorer
State—Under Secretary John Irwin	B/Gen. Robert P. Lukeman
Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson	Gen. Melvin Zais
Mr. James Wilson	OMB—Mr. James Schlesinger
Defense—Mr. David Packard	NSC Staff—Mr. John H. Holdridge
Mr. G. Warren Nutter	Col. Richard T. Kennedy
Rear Adm. William R. Flanagan	Mr. D. Keith Guthrie
CIA—Lt. Gen. R. E. Cushman	
Mr. Thomas Karamessines	
Mr. William Wells	

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. The WSAG reviewed [*less than 1 line not declassified*] plans for employment of Thai Special Guerrilla Units in northern and southern Laos and Khmer Krom units in Cambodia.² The consensus was that these activities should continue to be justified to Congress on the basis that they constituted a continuation of programs already under way and that they served to protect US troops in Vietnam by attacking enemy supply lines and sanctuaries. The WSAG endorsed a State Department proposal to instruct Ambassador Swank to inform Lon Nol that the Khmer Krom units were to be used against enemy sanctuaries and lines of communications. This would serve to place on the record the US intent in supporting the Khmer Krom operations.

2. The WSAG agreed in principle to the proposal to replace Thai regular units in Long Tieng with SGUs. However, CIA and Defense are to provide an analysis of why the substitution of SGUs will not de-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Top Secret; Nodis. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House.

² In an October 16 memorandum to Kissinger, Johnson, Packard, and Moorer on funding Cambodian operations under the Fulbright Amendment to the Defense Procurement Act, which was enacted on October 7 and prohibited funds slated for the GVN or Thailand to go to Cambodia, [*text not declassified*] and that the Defense Department fund Thai, Cambodian, and Lao SGUs in central and south Laos. (Ibid., Box H-76, WSAG Meeting, Cambodia, 10/16/70)

grade friendly military capabilities in Northern Laos.³ Differences in armament and equipment between the regular Thai units and the SGUs will be specified. In addition, State will request Ambassador Godley's judgment on the desirability and timing of phasing the SGUs into Long Tieng.

3. Defense will coordinate preparation of an inter-agency paper setting forth the advantages and disadvantages of providing an M-16 factory to Indonesia in return for Indonesian assistance in supplying AK-47 weapons and ammunition to Cambodia. Arrangements made to pay Indonesia for ammunition supplied to Cambodia should provide generous compensation without, however, accepting unreasonable Indonesia prices.⁴

4. The WSAG was reminded that in considering the question of Thai military involvement in Cambodia, the President's deep interest in insuring that all feasible measures be taken to provide for the defense of Cambodia must be taken into account. In this connection, it is essential to obtain as soon as possible Thai agreement to contingency plans for employment of Thai ground and air forces in Cambodia as required; economic assistance trade-offs should be offered to the Thais to enlist their cooperation. The State Department will insure that Ambassador Unger is informed of the above considerations.⁵

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

³ Laird forwarded the study to Kissinger under a November 3 memorandum which recommended that the substitution proceed for political and budgetary reasons even though the SGUs would initially be less effective. Kissinger responded on November 27 that the recruitment and training of the SGUs should proceed and their effectiveness be reevaluated toward the end of March 1971. Both documents are attached to a memorandum from Holdridge and Kennedy to Kissinger, November 23. (Ibid., Box 548, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. VI)

⁴ In a memorandum to Kissinger, October 27, Packard indicated that the plans for the M-16 factory would not be economically practical. Kissinger responded with a memorandum to Packard, November 2, asking for a fuller study of the factory option. (Ibid., NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-76, WSAG Meeting, Cambodia, 10/16/70)

⁵ Unger was informed in telegram 172147 to Bangkok, October 19. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 LAOS) Kissinger also sent a letter to Unger on the issue, October 27; see *Foreign Relations, 1969-1976*, volume XX, Southeast Asia, 1969-1972, Document 95.

53. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to Secretary of State Rogers, Secretary of Defense Laird, Director of Central Intelligence Helms, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)¹

Washington, October 16, 1970.

SUBJECT

Cease-Fire in Vietnam

To further prepare the U.S. position on possible Vietnam cease-fire negotiations, the President has asked for additional analysis in order to:

1. Establish specific and comprehensive negotiating criteria on all aspects of enemy behavior under an in place cease-fire; and, related thereto, develop our criteria for determining violations. These criteria would include definition and development of measures for:

- what “in place” means for various types of enemy units,
- what infiltration and resupply activities are permitted,
- a prohibition on acts of terror,
- construction of military installations or fortifications,
- subversion,
- political activity.

2. Define the limits on GVN activities and possible U.S. postures with regard to monitoring and controlling GVN violations.

3. Assess U.S. and GVN verification capabilities, including the use of in-country and out of country facilities.

4. Develop alternative roles for international supervisory bodies including how such mechanisms would function in the field.

5. Establish criteria and measures of the situation in the country-side that include GVN control and political attitudes which would permit our side to assess how, over time, the GVN's position holds up under in-place cease-fire conditions, and determine what time limits might be established in anticipation of a possible deterioration in the GVN's position.

6. Determine the critical aspects of and develop criteria for assessing enemy strength and performance (e.g., of the VCI) under a cease-fire.

7. Specify measures the GVN could take both before and during a cease-fire to strengthen its cease-fire position.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 66, Vietnam Subject Files, Cease-Fire, Vol. II 1970. Secret.

8. Consider possible cease-fire arrangements in Laos and Cambodia.

9. Develop alternative U.S. cease-fire negotiating postures encompassing the timing of U.S. initiatives, the scope and nature of GVN and possible third party involvement in the negotiations, the form of specific U.S. proposals, and giving consideration to possible enemy initiatives and responses.

This analysis will be undertaken by the Vietnam Special Studies Group under the direction of the VSSG Working Group. It should be completed by December 1, 1970.

Henry A. Kissinger

54. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, October 17, 1970, 5 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Henry A. Kissinger
Ambassador Dobrynin

[Omitted here is unrelated discussion.]

On Vietnam, Gromyko had probed to find out whether we had any interest in a coalition but he had found out from the Secretary that there was no real progress to be made in that direction.² Dobrynin said the reason for this probe was not because the Soviet Union wanted to interject itself into the negotiations but because they would undoubtedly be asked by the North Vietnamese what our position was and they wanted to make absolutely sure. They had been told by the North Vietnamese that the only thing that they were interested in was a coalition government.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 490, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1970, Vol. 2. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the Map Room at the White House. According to Kissinger's Record of Schedule, the meeting ended at 7:15 p.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1969–1976) The full text of the memorandum of conversation is in *Foreign Relations*, 1969–1976, volume XIII, Soviet Union, October 1970–October 1971, Document 14.

² Rogers and Gromyko met on October 16 in New York from 8 to 11:45 p.m. Kissinger summarized the meeting in an October 18 memorandum to the President; see *ibid.*, Document 16. A memorandum of conversation, October 16, is in the National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 15 VIET S.

I said we shouldn't play games with each other. They weren't asking for a coalition government; they were asking for a thinly-veiled takeover. They wanted to determine the membership of the PRG contingent in a coalition government and have a veto over the two components—from the Saigon administration and from the other element. They would accomplish this by saying that they had to stand for freedom, peace, independence, and neutrality. But only they knew what peace, independence, and neutrality meant. They also gave themselves another out by saying "genuinely" standing for peace, independence and neutrality. Dobrynin said I might not believe this but the Soviet Union genuinely had no interest in exacerbating the relationship but they also knew that they had no real influence with the North Vietnamese. Therefore, they were functioning primarily as a communication contact. I said I felt they had some influence but I wasn't going to press the subject.³

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam, with the exception that during the discussion, Dobrynin said that Nixon would have to be the one to make a proposal on Vietnam during his upcoming meeting with Gromyko.]

³ Kissinger is probably referring to the Communist presentation at the September 17 plenary session in Paris where, according to a (North) Vietnamese official history, the PRG delegation demanded: "The establishment in Saigon of an administration without Thieu-Ky-Kheim, standing for peace, independence, neutrality, improving the people's living conditions, ensuring the democratic freedoms, releasing people imprisoned for political reasons, [and] dismantling concentration camps so that the people might return to their native place and earn their living." (Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho-Kissinger Negotiations in Paris*, p. 149) Kissinger's comment on his September 7, 1970, meeting in Paris with Xuan Thuy is also applicable here: "We were not to leave until we had overthrown all the leaders who had been our allies—President Thieu, Vice President Ky, and Premier, Khiem. . . . If we did not overthrow this government, Xuan Thuy said, 'no settlement can be reached.'" (Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 977)

55. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, October 19, 1970, 3 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger
Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker
Mr. William R. Smyser

During the conversation, the following points were covered:

Withdrawals.

Ambassador Bunker said that he had informed President Thieu of the additional 30,000 to be withdrawn by the end of the year. Thieu had said that the Vietnamese could make up for our withdrawals in Vietnam but that he would have to pull one task force out of Cambodia. Thieu said he could still, if necessary, put in a division in case Phnom Penh was threatened.

Dr. Kissinger said that we had to make the additional withdrawals because of Secretary Laird's cutback in the draft calls. There simply were not enough men to go around. Ambassador Bunker said he understood. He was worried by a report he had heard from General Stilwell that the January draft calls were down to 15,000. That figure might suffice for Vietnam but not for the other obligations, and we might find ourselves in the same situation again. Dr. Kissinger said he would immediately get on top of this in order to prevent further maneuvering which would prejudice our freedom of action.

Ambassador Bunker said that President Thieu hoped he could learn about our later long-range withdrawal plans in order to make his own plans. Dr. Kissinger said this presents problems because any schedule that the President gave President Thieu would be leaked here and would tie our hands.

Ky.

Ambassador Bunker said that Vice President Ky had talked to him about some new negotiating initiatives. Bunker had later learned that those initiatives represented Thieu's ideas rather than Ky's, although

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 149, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 1 Oct 70. Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. Sent for information. According to Kissinger's Record of Schedule, the meeting ended at 3:45 p.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1969-76) The memorandum of conversation was prepared on October 20 and Smyser forwarded it to Kissinger under a covering memorandum on that day. Kissinger approved it, and wrote that there should be no further distribution.

Ky did not attribute them to Thieu. Ambassador Bunker said that he hoped that the President and Dr. Kissinger would have a chance to meet with Ky while he was here. Dr. Kissinger said we would arrange to meet with Ky but wanted to be careful not to build him up as a rival for President Thieu. He said he had been much impressed with Ky during their conversation in Paris.

The South Vietnamese Economy.

Ambassador Bunker said he thought we were now on top of this problem. Chuck Cooper had taken hold very well and was working very closely with the Vietnamese. There had been some price increases after devaluation but it had not been as bad as it might have been and the situation was under control. He said it was important that we keep up our support of the economy for the next few years.

North Vietnamese Plans.

Ambassador Bunker said he did not believe the North Vietnamese were ready to talk seriously, and in fact he thought they would try to keep the war going at least until the 1972 elections. He said the North Vietnamese could threaten Cambodia and could also hit us in I and II Corps. He said he was worried about the step-up in infiltration and wanted to do more about the Laos trails. General Clay, he said, was now concentrating our air power on the infiltration routes. Ambassador Bunker said he hoped we could do more to interdict the Lao Trail and Kissinger remarked that State was actively dissolving all the Thai units which he hoped could help us there.

The 1971 Elections.

Ambassador Bunker said he thought Thieu had a good chance of winning those elections. He felt that after Tet much of the Government's and general South Vietnamese activity would be focused on the elections.

56. **Memorandum for the President's File by the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)** ¹

Washington, October 21, 1970.

RE

Meeting in the President's Office with Souvanna Phouma, Prime Minister of Laos (11:05–11:45 a.m.) (Mrs. Porson, State Department interpreter)

While the press photographers were in the President's office at the outset of the meeting, the Prime Minister mentioned to the President that he had met Senator Fulbright in St. Louis yesterday, where he had delivered a speech; he added that the Senator had not reacted at all to the speech.

When the photographers left, the Prime Minister started by thanking the President for his decision to grant the RLG the funds necessary to defend Sam Thong and Long Thien at a very critical time. As the Prime Minister had cabled the President, if these positions had been lost, it would have had a disastrous psychological effect on Laos. Now, thanks to that aid, the Lao have overcome their difficulties and resumed the offensive. Apparently, the current offensive against the Plain of Jars and Ban Na is going well, and the Prime Minister hoped that all the RLG's objectives would soon be attained.

The President asked the Prime Minister for his view of the cease-fire proposals that had been made.² He asked whether he thought the North Vietnamese might respond favorably or whether they might instead try to separate out Laos as a special case.

The Prime Minister said they were trying to separate the Laos question from the over-all Vietnamese question. His reasons for that view were that neither Peking nor Hanoi had expressed any objections to the opening of contacts between the RLG and the Pathet Lao. Moreover, the Cambodian front is creating additional difficulties for the North Vietnamese, in that they find themselves unable to fight on three fronts: Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam. It is possible that they may want to step down the level of activity in Laos and accept, in a distorted way, the Prime Minister's proposals to Hanoi of some two or

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 82, Memoranda for the President, Beginning October 18, 1970. Secret; Nodis. According to a briefing memorandum from Irwin to Nixon, October 20, Souvanna arrived in the United States on October 15, addressed the UN General Assembly on October 19, spoke with Rogers in New York on October 19, and also met there with Irwin on October 17 and Green on October 16. He planned to return to Laos on October 22. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 7 LAOS)

² See Document 46.

three years ago, to the effect that if the North Vietnamese would withdraw their troops from Laos, the bombing would be stopped and the North Vietnamese would be allowed by the RLG to use the Ho Chi Minh Trail, over which the RLG had no control and which was the affair of the United States and the North Vietnamese. It is possible, concluded the Prime Minister, that it is along those lines that the other side would like to see the Laos problem resolved.

The President asked the Prime Minister for his estimate of the Cambodian operation—whether he thought it had been helpful to the general situation in Indochina.

The Prime Minister's reply was twofold: First, the operations in Cambodia had created some difficulties for the Lao, represented by the North Vietnamese offensive and the taking of Attopeu and Saravane. The North Vietnamese object is to create a second supply route to Cambodia and South Vietnam, parallel to the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The second point was that the destruction of the military potential in Cambodia of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong and the elimination of their main supply route via Sihanoukville had weakened the enemy's strength. The supplies destroyed in Cambodia can never be built back up because the capacity of the Ho Chi Minh Trail is substantially less than that of Sihanoukville.

The President then asked the Prime Minister for his opinion of why the American casualty rate in South Vietnam is so low—last week we took 40 casualties compared to 200 for the same week in 1969 and 300 for the same week in 1968. Did he think that was due to a lessening of the enemy's capability or rather were they deliberately trying to break contact and thus reduce the number of casualties?

The Prime Minister said "Both." On the one hand, the enemy's manpower potential was clearly weaker—they had lost at least 40,000 men in Cambodia. Additional evidence was the discovery by RLG troops on the battlefields in Laos of the bodies of North Vietnamese women soldiers. It was also important to note that the renowned main strength units of the Viet Minh, those who fought against the French, have by now been decimated, and the new soldiers are less combative. For example, prior to 1963, the RLG forces had never been able to take any North Vietnamese prisoners; since 1963–64, they have taken over 100. Also, there are many pure Vietnamese who have rallied to the RLG side. Therefore, the Prime Minister thought the enemy was running out of strength.

The Prime Minister then commented that he thought that the President's ceasefire proposal had been rejected by Hanoi and the Liberation Front for propaganda purposes and that basically they want to seek the way to peace.

The President asked what we should do—should we continue to press for a ceasefire or assume that there was no hope? Is there a chance that the other side might nibble?

The Prime Minister said we should back them up to the wall. It is necessary to study the question of the withdrawal of United States forces and to determine roughly when that withdrawal could take place under the conditions the enemy desires. Then we can see how the other side reacts and if, when the date draws nigh, there has been nothing positive from them, it would not be too late to act accordingly.

The President asked whether he meant taking stronger measures?

The Prime Minister said yes, if necessary. He thought that the fact of setting a date would show the United States' strength and have a definite favorable impact on domestic and foreign public opinion.

He suggested that the measures envisaged might include strengthening the United States forces in Thailand, which Thailand would welcome.

The President then expressed our gratitude for the Prime Minister's strong support of our peace plan. He assured him that he should not be concerned about Senator Fulbright's reaction. Unfortunately, there are men like Fulbright, Symington, and others who never miss a chance to attack United States assistance to Laos and Cambodia, especially Laos. As the Prime Minister knew from previous meetings, the President said, he was strongly with him in his efforts to obtain a cease-fire and an independent Laos. We have difficulties with public opinion in the United States, but he, the President, would personally do all he could to resist the efforts of men like Fulbright and Symington who would let Laos go down the drain.

The Prime Minister thought his St. Louis speech of yesterday had made an impression on Senator Fulbright. In it, he had talked of Laos' 25-year fight for survival, its desire for peace, its satisfaction with the United States' decision to help it after Chairman Khrushchev had turned down its request for arms, and its total approval of the President's proposal. He had also stated that there was no agreement signed between the United States and Laos.

The President remarked that that was a very strong case, which it would be hard for Senator Fulbright to attack. He added that, as the Prime Minister knows, we have to do some things in private that we do not admit publicly, and we shall continue to do so.

The Prime Minister thanked the President, saying that the RLG is counting absolutely on United States assistance to bring peace as soon as possible, but peace in justice and independence.

In sum, the President asked, compared to his views expressed at their last meeting at the White House a few months ago,³ was the Prime

³ The two met on October 7, 1969; see *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume VI, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Documents 132 and 133.

Minister more optimistic about the prospects for peace and did he think the enemy was weaker?

The Prime Minister's answer was yes to both. Besides the signs of enemy weakness that he had already indicated, there was an even more important sign. After the publication of the joint communiqué following the meeting between Sihanouk, Souphanouvong, Pham Van Dong, et al., Mao Tse Tung had come out strongly urging the Liberation Fronts of Indochina to wage all-out war. Yet, there was no reaction when the Pathet Lao contacted the Prime Minister. If there was no agreement between the Pathet Lao, Hanoi, and Peking, then Peking would not let the Pathet Lao resolve the Laos problem outside of the over-all Indochina problem.

The President then asked whether the Prime Minister was surprised that the new Cambodian Government has survived as long as it has.

The Prime Minister said no, because he knew the Cambodians. In Cambodia, as in Laos, there is anti-Vietnamese feeling, which is even stronger in Cambodia than in Laos, as was evidenced by the massacres immediately after the coup d'état. Additionally, the Cambodians have always been better fighters than the Lao or the Vietnamese. For example, during the Indochina war whenever a major strike was called for, it was the Cambodians who handled it. Now that the government of Cambodia has had enough respite to consolidate its armed forces and is continuing to receive outside assistance, the Prime Minister was not surprised that General Lon Nol had been able to take things in hand. He did, however, regret that the new government had not heeded his advice, sent via a Lao dignitary to Phnom Penh, to retain the monarchy and keep the Queen as a symbol, and not to rush things. This was because the peasants and the clergy, as in Laos, are respectful of the monarchy.

He feared that the creation of the republic would create a new opposition faction, that of the monarchists, drawn essentially from the peasants and the clergy. He thought that opposition group would feed the guerrilla forces of the other side. He hoped he was wrong, but that was his view.

The President then expressed his good wishes to the Prime Minister on his return to Laos, saying that we would continue to keep in close touch with him and to work with him. For our part, we shall continue to keep public opinion in the United States informed, so that those Senators who create problems for our aid to Laos will have no base to destroy the program.

Before taking his leave, the Prime Minister wished to bring up one last question, which he had already discussed with Assistant Secretary Marshall Green, namely, the cancellation by AID effective November 1 of the funds for importation of petroleum products used to fuel the

power plants.⁴ He said the cancellation would have an extremely serious impact on the cost of living and therefore he asked whether it could be put off until the end of 1971, by which time the Nam Ngum hydroelectric plant would be operational, thus causing a 90 percent drop in the requirement for diesel and the like. That was the only request he had to make.

The President said we would have it in mind in reviewing our budget, adding that perhaps there was a Congressional problem regarding funds. He asked General Haig to look into the matter.

In closing, the Prime Minister warmly thanked the President for his help and for seeing him today. The President wished him well and expressed good wishes to the Lao people, whom he liked and remembered well from his visit in 1953. He also asked the Prime Minister to convey his best regards to Ambassador Godley.

⁴ In a memorandum to Kissinger, October 22, Eliot indicated that AID had worked out a plan to continue financing the petroleum imports needed by the Lao Electric Company until December 31 and would devise a solution to the exchange rate problem for imports thereafter. Haig sent a memorandum to Nixon, October 24, with this information. (Both in National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 548, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. VI)

57. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, October 21, 1970.

SUBJECT

Secretary Rogers' Exchange With Gromyko on Vietnam

The following summary of the exchange between Secretary Rogers and Foreign Minister Gromyko on Vietnam² underlines the need for you to take a direct and tough line with Gromyko in your meeting.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 490, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin–Kissinger, 1970, Vol. 2. Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. Sent for information.

² Regarding Rogers' meeting with Gromyko on October 16, see footnote 2, Document 54. Rogers also met with Gromyko on October 19. A retyped copy of Secto 24 from USUN reporting on that meeting is Tab E to a memorandum from Kissinger to the President, October 20. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 71, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Gromyko, 1970)

Gromyko's Statements:

—Gromyko did not seem anxious to talk about Vietnam. When the Secretary first raised the subject, Gromyko said he had nothing to add to the DRV/PRG position. He urged us to present new proposals in Paris, where we were in direct contact. Halfway through the conversation he stated that he had exhausted what he was going to say.

—Once he warmed to his subject, however, Gromyko was very forceful. He pushed particularly hard on coalition government. He first asked if we were holding coalition government in reserve, and he explained that if we wanted Soviet help he had to have room to be helpful. He then asked if we ruled out coalition government. When the Secretary said we did not like this formulation, Gromyko said he would tell the PRG we “ruled out” a coalition government. Then, when the Secretary said that we did not rule out anything approved by the South Vietnamese and the PRG, Gromyko said he would tell the PRG that the U.S. was agreeable to a coalition.

—It seems clear that Gromyko did not want to get involved in a Vietnam discussion, since he already had enough serious topics to discuss with us. But he backed the Hanoi line quite hard once he got into the topic, trying to drive the Secretary into ambivalence or compromise.

The Secretary's Points:

—The Secretary emphasized our readiness to negotiate and our readiness to accept any political arrangement worked out among the South Vietnamese.

—The Secretary began by citing your five points³ and saying that Vietnamization would continue if Hanoi did not negotiate. He said Hanoi could get a settlement proportionate to Viet Cong strength.

—The Secretary said we supported selection of the South Vietnamese government by the South Vietnamese people, and that the only way we were familiar with was elections. If there is some other way, it is up to the South Vietnamese.

—When Gromyko asked if we ruled out coalition government, the Secretary asked him what he meant by this. Did they mean something like the German coalition? He said Hanoi just wanted us to get rid of the present government. He also said that we would not use the words “coalition government,” but that a solution worked out by the PRG and Saigon would be acceptable. He stressed that we did not accept the term itself, but would accept a solution worked out among the South Vietnamese.

³ See Document 46.

—When Gromyko then said he would tell the PRG that we might agree to a coalition, the Secretary said that he could inform the PRG that the U.S. would accept any solution they could work out with the South Vietnamese government.

Comment

I think that Secretary Rogers did well in leaving open the two ways to a political solution, by direct negotiations between Saigon and the PRG or alternatively, by elections. There is, however, the danger that the Secretary's purposely vague explanations might be misunderstood as opening the way for ultimately accepting Hanoi's views.

I therefore think that it is absolutely imperative that you lay out, in the clearest possible terms, our position on a coalition government and making no further concessions. Gromyko can probably be counted on to report your views accurately. For us to leave any doubt on these issues would only serve to prolong the war.

58. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, October 22, 1970, 11 a.m.–1:30 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

US

The President

William P. Rogers, Secretary of State

Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

William D. Krimer, Interpreter, Department of State

USSR

A. A. Gromyko, Soviet Foreign Minister

A. F. Dobrynin, Soviet Ambassador

Viktor Sukhodrev, Interpreter, Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The President welcomed Foreign Minister Gromyko to Washington and said that he appreciated the opportunity to have a talk with him. He had been informed that Mr. Rogers and Mr. Gromyko had held

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 71, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Gromyko 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the Oval Office. The full text of the memorandum of conversation is printed in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976, Soviet Union*, volume XIII, October 1970–October 1971, Document 23.

useful conversations in New York.² It would be helpful if today they could discuss the questions of the general relationship between their two countries. The President said he was prepared to take up any items that the Minister wanted to bring up. Specific problem areas, in his view, which could be usefully discussed concern the Middle East, the Berlin negotiations between the Four Powers, SALT, a most important issue, Western Hemisphere problems, specifically Cuba, and problems in Asia, specifically Vietnam.³

[Omitted here is material unrelated to Vietnam.]

The President said that there were possibilities in this field. He thought one would have to be realistic and say that some of the other problems come into play when it comes to considering the possibility of increasing trade between the two countries. For example, the Vietnam war, which involved our primary and basic interests, was bound to have an inhibiting influence upon trade. It was a fact that under our legislative arrangements some items which could be used to aid North Vietnam could not be exported to the Soviet Union. We were indeed prepared to explore ways in which trade between our two countries could be increased. He did not like to use the word “linkage”, but it was true nevertheless that a settlement of these other matters would lead to increasing economic exchanges between us. He therefore felt that if our political relations improved, increased trade would follow naturally. This was in our interest as well as in the interest of the Soviet Union.

[Omitted here is material unrelated to Vietnam.]

Vietnam

The President said that he would raise the subject of Vietnam only in passing, in view of the fact that Mr. Gromyko and Secretary Rogers had already discussed it in New York, and that it had been reported to him that Mr. Gromyko saw no prospects of North Vietnam or the Provisional Revolutionary Government engaging in a discussion of our proposal. Our position in this matter was as follows: we have made a

² See Document 57.

³ In an October 19 memorandum to Nixon briefing him for the meeting, Kissinger noted that while the Soviets had been accurately reporting the administration's views to Hanoi, they had been unwilling to do more. So that the Soviets did not become merely intermediaries, he advised Nixon to be tough and say the following: A stable settlement was possible based on his October 7 proposals, but if Hanoi was not forthcoming then the United States would continue with Vietnamization, which was working; Hanoi's political proposals were unrealistic; and it would be a mistake for Hanoi to increase its military activity because it would not prompt a precipitate U.S. withdrawal or disguised defeat. The memorandum is printed in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976, Soviet Union*, volume XIII, October 1970–October 1971, Document 18.

proposal⁴ and this is as far as we would go. It had been suggested, for example, that unilateral withdrawals be made without discussion with the other side. This was completely out of the question. The President said he had carefully considered the recent proposal advanced by the United States and if North Vietnam and the PRG declined to discuss our proposal in Paris, we would simply have to proceed down the other road, our program of Vietnamization. That program also would end the war, although the road would be longer. We would much prefer to shorten the war by meaningful discussions with the other side. The problem of Vietnam, of course, involved the United States to a far greater degree than the Soviet Union, for the simple reason that so many U.S. soldiers had been killed there. If, in the future, we should have to undertake forceful moves to protect the interests of our men, we would do so resolutely, but would also inform the Soviet side as we had done at the time of Cambodia. The President hoped that Mr. Gromyko would understand our position, by putting himself in our place. Since we were in this area we must protect our interests. We had made our proposal and hoped that it would be a basis for negotiation. If this failed to stimulate an interested reaction on the other side, we would proceed down the other track as forcefully as we considered necessary.

Mr. Gromyko said that in his view there was no prospect of the other side engaging in discussions unless the United States was willing to work out the timing for withdrawal of its troops, and agreed to the establishment of a coalition government for South Vietnam. His statement was based upon his knowledge of the position of North Vietnam. The President had spoken of the possibilities open to the United States and had said that the recent proposals were as far as we could go. Of course, we would be able to judge the situation better than he, but it was his impression that if we were serious about wanting to put an end to the war, we would have to go along with the two conditions he had mentioned. He would be less than frank if he did not tell the President the same thing he had said to Secretary Rogers.

The President appreciated Mr. Gromyko's candor and said he knew that we disagreed on this subject. Regarding a date for withdrawal of U.S. troops, we were willing to negotiate a mutual withdrawal of forces. We were not going to indicate any date in advance on unilateral withdrawal, however, since to do so would mean to destroy our negotiating position. In regard to the coalition government, the opposition spoke of a coalition government as one that would be set up after removing all elected people in the present government.

⁴ The President is referring to his October 7 speech; see Document 46.

This was totally unacceptable to us. As he had said earlier, and as Secretary Rogers had told Mr. Gromyko in New York, whatever the leaders of North Vietnam and the PRG could arrange with South Vietnam would be acceptable to us.

If North Vietnam tried to step up military operations we would take strong actions. In that case, we would inform the Soviet leaders in advance. We had our interests in the area and we had our plan which was succeeding. We were confident that our plan would succeed. Time was now on our side, even though we regretted that it would take longer than the negotiating route. The President emphasized that we would do our best not to permit the Vietnam situation to interfere with our bilateral relations with the Soviet Union.

[Omitted here is material unrelated to Vietnam.]

59. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, October 22, 1970.

SUBJECT

Hanoi's Short Term Intentions

The CIA has produced a memorandum on Hanoi's intentions over the next six months or so (Tab A).² The major points follow.

Hanoi's fundamental view of the struggle has not changed. The Communists still believe that they have more staying power than their opponents, and they are gearing their efforts to a long, drawn-out contest. It seems clear that they are determined to make the sacrifices required by the wider war in Indochina; there is some evidence that Hanoi has stepped up its recruitment efforts, and the southward flow of troops from North Vietnam began earlier than usual this year.

Before the U.S. elections. The Communists could take several different courses of action in an attempt to influence the U.S. Congressional elections.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 149, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, 1 Oct 70. Secret; SPOKE. Sent for information. A stamped notation reads, "The President has seen."

² Attached but not printed.

—They could step up military pressure in the northernmost provinces of South Vietnam, attempt to inflict a severe defeat on the Cambodian task force northeast of Phnom Penh, or maneuver diplomatically to arouse peace sentiments in the U.S.

—We have no evidence as to what they are planning.

The next six months. The range of practical alternatives open to Hanoi is not very broad.

—With the loss of Sihanoukville and the disruptions caused by the allied operations in Cambodia, much of the Communist effort will be devoted to expanding and reinforcing their logistics system in southern Laos, and attempting to re-establish a credible military threat in or near southern South Vietnam.

—It is unlikely that the Communists will attempt an all-out offensive anywhere in Indochina during the next six months. Some short and sharp offensive action cannot be ruled out, but the Communists primarily will play for time by conducting a low cost, low level struggle.

—The Communists will continue to hammer away at the Government of South Vietnam by insisting that the Thieu-Ky leadership stands in the way of a settlement.

—They will probably engage in some wary exploration of the allied position in Paris. But they do not expect much change in the allied position, and they are not willing to pay a price that would seriously jeopardize their chances for success in South Vietnam.

Comment. The CIA clearly interprets the evidence, including recent infiltration activity, as part of a long term Communist effort. It largely discounts any significant increase in military action during the next six months, either before or after the U.S. Congressional elections. We agree that much of Hanoi's efforts during this period will necessarily be directed toward rebuilding diminished capabilities, but it is also quite possible that Hanoi may try some spectaculars during this period, such as rocket attacks on U.S. bases.

Hanoi's growing manpower commitments bear watching. The Communists have injected about 20,000 troops into the Laotian panhandle since June. The destinations of all these troops is not yet clear; some could be bound for South Vietnam or Cambodia, though most of them will probably be used to expand and reinforce the trail network in southern Laos. In addition, about 3,800 troops have begun to move toward southern South Vietnam (COSVN) so far this month. The numerical sequence of the groups in which they are moving suggest that many more are scheduled to follow. Last year, infiltration into the Laotian panhandle itself was negligible, while groups destined for southern South Vietnam did not start to move until early November.

60. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, October 23, 1970.

SUBJECT

Cambodia Strategy

The issue of the most appropriate FY 1971 U.S. strategy toward Cambodia has been thoroughly examined within the NSC framework. This study (NSSM 99)² contained some first rate analysis that when placed before the Senior Review Group produced a consensus as to the course we should follow.³

The analysis showed that the emergence of a friendly Cambodia has benefited Vietnamization:

—Whereas in South Vietnam the friendly to enemy force ratio is 2.1 to 1.0, in Cambodia RVNAF to NVA/VC ratio is 1.4 to 1.0. This means that proportionally almost twice as many enemy forces as friendly forces have been diverted to Cambodia in comparison with their relationship in South Vietnam. These diversions have helped boost pacification in South Vietnam by 11% in MR 3 and 7% in MR 4 since May 1, 1970.

—The enemy is no longer able to use Sihanoukville to supply his forces in MR's 2, 3, and 4. As you know, recently available evidence has shown that practically *all* the weapons and ammunition used by NVA/VC forces in MR's 2, 3, and 4 from 1966 to 1970 was shipped through Sihanoukville.⁴ Moreover, much of the enemy's food and other consumables was purchased on the Cambodian economy and shipped into South Vietnam and South Laos. The enemy must build a whole new logistics network, a task that will occupy many of his resources over the coming dry season. He must also distribute these supplies into South Vietnam, a task now greatly complicated by ARVN cross-border operations.

The analysis concluded that the preservation of a Cambodian government on as much territory as possible will continue to bring

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-219, NSDMs, NSDM 89. Top Secret. Sent for action. K. Wayne Smith sent a copy of this memorandum to Kissinger on October 21, recommending that he sign it. (Ibid., Box 511, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. X)

² The response to NSSM 99, "U.S. Strategy Option for Cambodia," prepared by the VSSG Working Group for the SRG, September 13, is summarized in Document 39. NSSM 99 is Document 25.

³ See Document 51.

⁴ See Document 42.

substantial benefits to Vietnamization, not to mention the obvious political significance of the survival of a non-communist Cambodian government.

Given this urgency it was necessary to make immediate funding arrangements to meet 2nd quarter FY 1971 military requirements and ship long-lead time items needed in the 3rd quarter. The SRG recommends approval of several interim funding measures:

- \$49 million transfer of supporting assistance from AID to MAP.
- initiation of a \$20 million PL 480 program.
- the commitment of \$11 million in AID contingency funds to Cambodia after submission of the supplemental request.

Favorable Congressional action on the Administration's forthcoming supplemental would permit these funds to be paid back.

I recommend you approve these SRG recommendations.⁵

If you will approve I will issue the NSDM to this effect at Tab A.⁶

⁵ Nixon initialed his approval on October 26.

⁶ Tab A as approved is NSDM 89, Document 61.

61. National Security Decision Memorandum 89¹

Washington, October 26, 1970.

TO

The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
The Director, Office of Management and Budget
The Administrator, Agency for International Development

SUBJECT

Cambodia Strategy

The President has reviewed the results of the Phase I NSSM 99 analysis and the associated Senior Review Group recommendations on Cambodian strategy for FY 1971.²

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-219, Policy Papers (1969–1974), National Security Decision Memorandums, NSDM 89. Top Secret. Copies were sent to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Director of Central Intelligence.

² See Document 60.

He has approved Strategy 3 variant 3 as described in NSSM 99 as the basis for U.S. support for Cambodian forces and the Cambodian economy during FY 1971. In implementing his decision, special attention is to be given to the development of capable Cambodian light infantry forces with supporting weapons as appropriate and to the establishment of effective GKR control in the countryside.

It is expected that economic assistance to the GKR will be provided contingent on the appropriate GKR budget, wage, exchange rate and rice policies and be accompanied by the use of some GKR foreign exchange to meet essential requirements.

In all cases, our policy should seek to capitalize on Cambodian nationalism, support Cambodian neutrality, and promote GKR self-sufficiency. Our policy should also assist in the development of close working relationships between the GKR and the friendly governments of South Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos. The U.S. should give particular attention to aiding the GKR in obtaining international support for its neutrality, economy, and forces.

In recognition of possible serious dry season threats to Cambodia, the President has approved the following guidelines.

—Deployment of South Vietnamese forces in Cambodia's defense should be mainly (but not exclusively) limited to the areas from the South Vietnam border west to a line from Kompong Som to Phnom Penh and north along the Mekong.

—Contingency plans should be developed with Thailand for the possible deployment of Thai forces to aid in the defense of western Cambodia.

Pending Congressional action on the forthcoming Administration request for a Cambodian supplemental, the following funding actions should be taken to meet near term assistance requirements:

—the transfer of \$49 million in Supporting Assistance to the MAP program for use in Cambodia,

—the institution of a \$20 million PL 480 program for Cambodia,

—the commitment of \$11 million in AID contingency funds to Cambodia, either through a MAP transfer or as grant assistance, after the Administration's supplemental request has gone forward,

—the authorization of DOD offshore procurement to the extent practicable.

To prepare for the possible contingency that the Administration has not obtained a supplemental by January, 1971, the President has approved the following preparatory measures:

—The Department of Defense will take those measures necessary to permit the fullest possible utilization of Section "506" resources to cover the balance of the FY 1971 Cambodian assistance program.

—The Agency for International Development will be prepared to divert Development Loan funds either to Cambodia directly or to third countries so as to free supporting assistance for Cambodia in sums adequate to cover the balance of the FY 1971 program.

Henry A. Kissinger

62. Report Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency¹

SC No. 12197/70

Washington, November 1970.

POST MORTEM: THE ROLE OF CAMBODIA IN SUPPLYING VC/NVA FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Foreword

Since 1965 the Intelligence Community has been concerned with the role of Cambodia as a source of supplies for the Communist forces in South Vietnam.² Throughout the time period, 1965 through mid-1970, there have been constant attempts at improving the collection and analysis of information so that the Sihanoukville/Cambodia problem could be resolved.

Over the years the differences in viewpoints between the Washington Intelligence Community and the field have centered on the volume of military supplies arriving in Cambodia, especially from Communist China, the share of these supplies consigned over the years to the VC/NVA forces as opposed to the Cambodian armed forces, and the importance of the overland route in also supplying Communist forces in the southern half of South Vietnam.

In the summer of 1970, CIA acquired from a high-ranking Cambodian officer an extensive and detailed set of documents providing a full accounting of the elaborate system established to move military supplies through Cambodia.³ These documents show that both the field

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 88, Vietnam Subject Files, CIA Report, November 1970, Post Mortem: The Role of Cambodia in Supplying VC/NVA Forces in South Vietnam. Secret; SPOKE.

² See Tab IX for a chronological summary of important developments in the Sihanoukville/Cambodia problem, 1965 through mid-1970. [Footnote in the original. The tabs are not printed.]

³ The documents were obtained from Lt. Col. Les Kosem who was co-chairman of the Special Transport Committee that was responsible for the movement of supplies to VC/NVA base areas in Cambodia. [Footnote in the original.]

and Washington, particularly the latter, seriously underestimated the volume of military supplies delivered to Sihanoukville for VC/NVA forces. The documents also made it absolutely clear that the so-called Sihanoukville route accounted for the bulk of supplies used by enemy forces in Southern II, III, and IV corps.

This memorandum presents the results of a post-mortem requested by the Director of Central Intelligence. The post-mortem considered the following questions:

1. What went wrong in the analysis of the reporting that was available that resulted in the incorrect judgments about the volume of arms shipments to Sihanoukville and the importance of these shipments in meeting Communist requirements in Southern II, III, and IV Corps?

2. What was the quality of the reporting that was available? With the advantage of hindsight, could the available reporting have supported different conclusions at earlier points in time? Did OER, which was producing most of the finished intelligence on the subject within CIA, move too slowly in changing its position over time?

3. Was the importance of the subject given sufficient recognition by the intelligence community and were the resources committed to collection and production adequate?

The post-mortem is largely the work of the Office of Economic Research. No effort was made to solicit contributions from DIA and State, whose views on the role of Cambodia were essentially the same as those of CIA. The Clandestine Services prepared at the request of OER a brief statement on the Agency's collection effort on the problem (Tab VI).⁴ NSA was asked to prepare a contribution on the steps it took to improve COMINT coverage on Cambodia (Tab VIII).⁵

Within OER, about 10 analysts were engaged in preparing contributions to the post-mortem. To the greatest extent possible the analysts who prepared the contributions were those who had actually worked on the problem. Where analyst files were no longer adequate to reassess the reporting of the previous years, files were recalled from record centers or machine runs made to obtain the older information.

[Omitted here is the body of the report.]

⁴ Attached, but not printed.

⁵ Attached, but not printed.

63. **Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon**¹

Washington, November 3, 1970.

SUBJECT

Report On Southeast Asia By Director of Central Intelligence

Director of Central Intelligence Helms has sent you a long report on his recent trip to Southeast Asia (Tab A).² A summary of Mr. Helms' appraisal of the prospects for South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia follows.

Overview. Southeast Asian political and military leaders were unanimous in their belief that the outcome of the struggle with Hanoi will basically determine the political shape of Indochina and the rest of mainland Southeast Asia during the next decade.

—A success for Hanoi would shortly change the political complexion of the area in ways adverse to U.S. interests and those of our allies.

—If Hanoi can be held in check while the U.S. presence is scaled down to an advisory-level minimum within the next two or three years, the prospects will be greatly enhanced for the evolution of a Southeast Asia with the will and ability to work with the U.S. in a mutually advantageous fashion.

—These opinions are not fully shared by knowledgeable persons in Washington. But they are nevertheless important, because the estimates of these local leaders shape their own actions and hence the outcome in Southeast Asia.

Hanoi's intentions. The past year has not been a good one for Hanoi. The Communists' fortunes have continued to head downward since their major effort at Tet 1968.

—Nearly all on the scene feel that a major contributor to Hanoi's current problems is the course of events which followed the change of government in Cambodia on March 18, especially the allied cross border operations.

—Hanoi has lost its Cambodian sanctuary and has been compelled to campaign on a whole new front, diverting significant assets from South Vietnam in the process.

—This situation has prevented Hanoi from registering any success of consequence, and this in turn has improved the morale and brightened the prospects of those resisting Hanoi.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 208, Agency Files, CIA, Vol. III. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information.

² Dated October 23; attached but not printed. A portion of the report is printed in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XX, Southeast Asia, 1969–1972, Document 94.

There are some very strong reasons why Hanoi would not wish to negotiate under these circumstances, and most observers are convinced that the Communists will make at least one major military effort—sometime before the beginning of the rainy season next May—before moving seriously in the negotiating arena.

—Indeed, quite aside from negotiations, Hanoi badly needs a significant, tangible victory for its effect on troop and Party morale.

—Opinion among observers on the ground is divided over where this effort may come, but a majority believe that it will be in Laos or Cambodia rather than South Vietnam.³ Those who might have to face such an effort still have a healthy respect for Hanoi's capabilities.

Helms personally believes that our most serious problems are likely to develop in north Laos, even though current evidence does not point this way.

—It is our weakest link, and he believes that Hanoi recognizes this.

—A Communist victory in north Laos could cause the Laotian government to fall or at least to negotiate political arrangements in accord with Communist demands, including an end to U.S. air action over Laos.⁴

—Hanoi would hope that a collapse in Laos would also rekindle U.S. domestic opposition to the war.

At present, Hanoi is making a major effort to refurbish its logistical bases in south Laos and Cambodia.

—If it is successful, it will be able to carry on its military efforts in South Vietnam and Cambodia for what, in political terms, is an indefinite period of time.

—If it fails, another year will have been gained for the non-Communist governments to solidify their position.

Prospects. The situation vis-à-vis the Communists in *South Vietnam* is generally well in hand. The major dangers are more economic and political, especially as the 1971 presidential election draws near.

—President Thieu's re-election seems most consonant with U.S. interests, but this is a judgment that need not be made now.

—Whatever the outcome of the election, it is essential to prevent the kind of political splits within the non-Communist camp that produced the unravelling divisions in 1963.

Lon Nol and his colleagues in *Cambodia* have put to excellent use the time bought by our cross border operations.

³ Nixon underlined the last half of the sentence.

⁴ Nixon highlighted this and the previous paragraph and wrote, "Something to watch."

—But Hanoi is exerting pressure and Cambodia will need at least the present mix of overt and covert assistance from us and her other allies, along with certain kinds of “surge” assistance should Hanoi mount an offensive.

—With this level of external help, Cambodia has a reasonable chance of surviving for the next year. If so, Hanoi will have suffered a major political defeat that will be recognized as such throughout Indochina.

As already noted, *Laos* is the area where a major Communist effort is likely to be mounted. Our immediate interests there are (1) to prevent Hanoi from achieving a military victory in north Laos and (2) to restrict Hanoi’s use of south Laos as a logistical conduit to its forces in Cambodia and South Vietnam.

—It is essential that Thai artillery and troops remain in the north, and that the present level of U.S. combat air support be continued there. When the enemy begins serious dry season operations, we will also need more airborne communications intelligence for detecting Communist troop movements.

—In south Laos, the harassment and interdiction capabilities of our guerrilla forces are limited, and the major burden of inhibiting the movement of enemy supplies will have to be borne by aerial interdiction.

Helms strongly believes that events over the next nine months or so will have a critical and perhaps decisive bearing on the outcome of the struggle.

—A military or political success by Hanoi would quickly reverse many of the now favorable trends.

—But if the present degree of stability can be maintained in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, then Hanoi may be persuaded that it must come to terms.

Comment. Whatever the Communists ultimately decide regarding negotiations, the short term tactical outlook bears careful watching. Opinion within the government is divided over whether Hanoi will mount a major military offensive before next summer, or whether it will concentrate on rebuilding its assets in Cambodia or South Vietnam for later use. In any event, it is clearly in our interest to prevent a large volume of supplies from moving through south Laos and to be prepared for a military push should the Communists attempt one. I agree with Mr. Helms’ recommendations regarding actions to be taken in north Laos.⁵

⁵ Nixon wrote at the bottom of the memorandum: “Very useful report.”

64. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Cambodia¹

Washington, November 4, 1970, 2320Z.

181759. Subj: Cheng Heng's Conversation with the President, Oct. 25.²

1. President Nixon expressed admiration of American people for courage shown by Cambodian people in these difficult times. They have surprised many observers by their capacity to defend selves. The President believed people like Cambodians, who cherish independence and are willing fight and sacrifice for it, will win out. We want to help, to the extent possible, so that Cambodians may be independent and choose own way without foreign invaders imposing their will.

2. Cheng Heng thanked the President on behalf of Cambodian people for his friendship, support, and assistance. Thanks to destruction of sanctuaries and provision of training, supplies and material, GKR has so far been able to resist VC/NVA advance. President Nixon remarked that we know no nation can survive unless its people are willing and able to defend selves. U.S. can help, but in final analysis it is character of Cambodians that will determine their future. We have been encouraged to see Cambodian bravery and loyalty to GKR.

3. Cheng Heng confirmed that all the people of Cambodia including youth, Buddhist monks, officials, and peasants—are determined to fight against enemy. GKR naturally wants to take offensive now, but lacks heavy weapons and communications equipment to do so. GKR wishes to free the people in enemy-controlled areas as soon as possible. These people do not support enemy and have sent emissaries to ask that they be liberated to supply GKR with information. GKR would like to equip 210,000 men by end of 1970. They have manpower but not enough weapons. The President replied that we are trying to cooperate. We have certain limitations placed on us by Congress, but the President has issued instructions that, to the extent possible, we want to cooperate with and assist FANK to defend themselves.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 511, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. XI, 11/70–1/71. Secret; Nodis. Drafted by P. J. Bennett in EA/LC, cleared by Thomas Corcoran in EA/LC and Holdridge, and approved by Green. Repeated to Saigon, Vientiane, and CINCPAC.

² An October 25 memorandum of conversation is *ibid.*, White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 82, Memoranda for the President, Beginning October 25, 1970. Cheng Heng also met with Vice President Agnew. A memorandum of conversation, October 22, is *ibid.*, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 7 CAMB. Kissinger met with Cambodian Foreign Minister Koun Wick on October 22. A memorandum of conversation is *ibid.*, NSC Files, Box 511, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. XI, 11/70–1/71.

Nixon Doctrine involves just that: we prefer not to go into a country and defend it ourselves, but to help it defend itself by providing U.S. assistance such as arms. He then asked whether Cheng Heng expecting a VC/ NVA offensive during coming dry season.

4. Cheng Heng said there were rumors to that effect, but he felt there was no need to be especially concerned because VC/NVA have already exhausted every means they have to eliminate Cambodians and have failed. Moreover, FANK and VC/NVA are pretty much on equal footing and face same conditions—“nous marchons comme eux.” Wet season did not present special advantage for GKR, and dry season would not present special advantage for enemy. Moreover, destruction of sanctuaries has made it hard for enemy to obtain supplies. They can no longer come by sea, and Ho Chi Minh Trail is very hard to traverse.

5. The President commented we must be sure they can never again obtain supplies by sea. He went on to ask what support Sihanouk had among population. Was there a small clique of supporters? Cheng Heng said that at time of Sihanouk's ouster GKR had support of right and some neutralists, but there had been a pro-Sihanouk group composed of wealthy people who had received favors from Sihanouk. Now, however, they too are coming over to GKR side, because much as they may think of Sihanouk they cannot be pro-Communist. Sihanouk's entourage in Peking, except for Communists who had come from Paris, are anxious to leave for France or Cambodia, and cannot stand life in Peking. He estimated about 10 to 12 would do so, e.g., Duong Sam 01. Sihanouk followers have apartments in Paris and money in Switzerland and France and are anxious to leave, but they are under house arrest. GKR representatives tried to make contact with some of them at Lusaka conference, but found they were always followed by three or four armed bodyguards. Latest word about Sihanouk is that he is in bad state and had reportedly attempted suicide. He is under ChiCom orders, required to recite prefabricated speeches—which he would never had done before. Moreover, the “reds” who came from Paris will not let him do as he pleases and require that all decisions be taken by vote, to Sihanouk's distaste. He broadcasts almost daily on Radio Peking and regularly contradicts himself. This is beneficial to GKR because Cambodians no longer want to listen to Radio Peking. They do not want to listen to Radio Phnom Penh, he added, because it exchanges insults with Sihanouk, but prefer VOA as more neutral and more credible. Old peasants particularly touched by VOA's continuing to refer to “Samdech” Sihanouk.

6. President Nixon asked how people had reacted to proclamation of republic. He mentioned that certain of his Southeast Asian friends had expressed concern, saying that peasants and old people favored retention of monarchy. Cheng Heng said that was not quite true. There

had been some concern about that, but people have come to understand and, except for a minority of old people, everyone favors republic after years of monarchic dictatorship. Even old people are being led to change their minds by their children, including officials, monks, youth leaders, etc. GKR had explained that Sihanouk himself destroyed monarchy by taking over position of King, then Chief of State, and acting like a president. He destroyed monarchy without regularizing situation. GKR had now done so and everyone understands that.

7. The President assured Cheng Heng we are proud to stand side by side with Cambodian people who have our admiration and support. He reiterated that it is not so much what we do but Cambodia's own determination that will keep it independent. He asked Cheng Heng to convey his best wishes to Lon Nol, Sirik Matak, and other colleagues, some of whom President met during his 1953 visit.

8. Cheng Heng reiterated Cambodian gratitude for the President's help. Since Cambodia has been going through difficult time economically, he would appreciate anything the President could do to "activate" economic aid. Also, GKR would welcome cultural assistance. They want to send young people to U.S. to study, not elsewhere where they may be led astray into the other camp.

9. The President said cultural assistance should have high priority. He believed in cultural exchange and liked idea of young Cambodians coming here to study. As for economic aid, he said we would take a sympathetic attitude toward GKR request. We recognize we cannot give military aid without economic aid. Dr. Kissinger pointed out we are now working on economic aid program.

10. Dr. Kissinger and Assistant Secretary Green were present during conversation.

Irwin

65. **Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to Secretary of State Rogers, Secretary of Defense Laird, and Director of Central Intelligence Helms¹**

Washington, November 4, 1970.

SUBJECT

Contingency Planning for Indo-China

1. The President has reviewed the indicators pointing to the likelihood of intensified North Vietnamese/Viet Cong military activity in Indo-China during the forthcoming dry season, notably the rise in enemy infiltration, and has directed that contingency studies be developed to cover the following points:²

—Areas where major enemy attacks can be anticipated, e.g. North Laos; MRs 3 and 4 of the Laotian Panhandle; MRs I and II of South Vietnam; the Phnom Penh, Kampong Thom, Seam Riep and the Battambang areas of Cambodia; etc.

—Estimates of the likely magnitudes of enemy attacks to the extent available intelligence data permits.

—The capacity of local forces in threatened areas to deal with the anticipated enemy attacks.

—Availability of South Vietnamese and Thai forces to assist in Laos and Cambodia.

—Availability of U.S. air, ground and naval forces to assist in the defense.

2. The President also has directed that plans be developed on the basis of the foregoing studies setting forth options for the coordinated employment of U.S., South Vietnamese, Thai, Cambodian and Lao forces to meet each contingency. Accompanying political steps which should be taken to support each option should be included.

3. These studies should be performed by an Ad Hoc Group comprising representatives of the addressees and of the NSC staff and chaired by the representative of the Secretary of Defense.

4. The contingency studies and related plans should be completed and submitted to the Assistant to the President for National Security

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 530, Country Files, Far East, Indochina, Vol. I. Top Secret; Sensitive. A copy was sent to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Kennedy and Holdridge forwarded a draft of this memorandum to Haig on November 2 noting that, "There is already considerable thrashing around the bureaucracy at the moment. This draft should help focus the effort and get some realistic options and scenarios which we can begin to refine (our own people are already working to this end)." On an attached note, Kissinger wrote, "OK."

² See Documents 59 and 60.

Affairs for review by the Washington Special Actions Group. The contingency studies should be submitted not later than November 20, 1970, and the related plans should be submitted not later than December 1, 1970.

Henry A. Kissinger

66. Memorandum From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, November 13, 1970.

SUBJECT

Your Meeting with Secretary Laird and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Moorer at 10:30 a.m., Friday, November 13, 1970—Room 3E 880, Pentagon

Background

The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the special plan² which you were briefed on last month and which is scheduled for execution next week.³ It is apparent that Secretary Laird and certainly General Pursley are having second thoughts on the operation. It is likely that they will surface a related plan which has been worked out by Defense and which involves the announcement by a Swedish citizen that he will make available a large vessel to carry U.S. Prisoners of War south

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 997, Haig Chronological Files, Haig Memcons 12/70–12/71, 1 of 3. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. According to Kissinger's schedule, he met with Laird at the Pentagon between 10:17 and 11:45 a.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76, Record of Schedule) No further record of the meeting was found.

² Reference is to Operation Ivory Coast, the planning phase for a joint Army–Air Force raid into the Son Tay POW camp 23 miles from Hanoi. According to a memorandum from Carver to Helms, December 4, Defense began planning for the mission in May 1970. Carver's memorandum outlined CIA assistance to the project. (Central Intelligence Agency, NIC Files: Job 80–R01720R, GAC Chrono, Oct 70–Dec 70)

³ According to an October 12 memorandum from [*name not declassified*] to Cushman, Brigadier General Donald D. Blackburn informed him that on October 8 he had briefed Kissinger who was "highly enthusiastic" and dismissed JCS concerns about the public's reaction and possible casualties among the North Vietnamese guards. He added that Kissinger would only discuss the plan with Nixon in person and since the President was not in Washington, Kissinger decided to postpone it until November. (Ibid., DDI Files: Job 80–T01629R, Box 4, JOIC Support to SAVA re Son Tay Raid) See Document 72.

from Hanoi to Saigon and presumably vice versa. This announcement is apparently just about to be made and Laird will take the position that the other operation would run directly contrary conceptually.⁴ Admiral Moorer on the other hand is very concerned that any delays in the highly classified project will result in a loss of at least six months time due to the peculiarities of weather and other operational factors.

The second problem area which could arise at today's meeting is the fact that a U.S. reconnaissance aircraft was shot down yesterday by air defenses in North Vietnam in the vicinity of the Mugia Pass. This follows a period of several other efforts of the North Vietnamese to shoot down reconnaissance aircraft. I understand no reaction was taken as a result of any of these incidents. Secretary Laird has sent over to you, however, the 72-hour plan which you and he discussed with the President. I have done a summary which is in your reading material.⁵

Conduct of the Meeting

I have called General Pursley and requested that Admiral Moorer definitely be included in the meeting so there is a complete understanding by the military on what position Laird took and what position you take. In my view, you should:

—Listen to Laird's pitch which will probably be quite ambivalent in front of the Chairman.

—Maintain a neutral stance on whether we should proceed with or delay on the operation.

—Make it clear to Secretary Laird that he raised the plan and made the recommendation, that it is apparent that the President is very interested and that you expect him to carry the ball.

⁴ In backchannel message WH02196 to Kissinger, November 12, Haig reported that Laird and Pursley believed that because of the Swedish announcement the administration should change its plans for Ivory Coast. (Ibid., Box 336, Subject Files, Items to Discuss with the President, 8 September 70–December 70) In a December 1 note to Laird, Capen wrote that he intended to "keep the pressure on my Swedish contact" to pursue the plan, but that he was having difficulty getting the Swedish Red Cross to cooperate. (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330-76-67, Box 98, Viet (North) 385.1)

⁵ Haig sent the summary to Kissinger under an undated covering memorandum along with a copy of the plan, which Pursley had sent to him on November 10. The plan called for air and naval operation against supply lines in North Vietnam and could be launched with 48 hours notice. Haig believed that it did not adequately address the effects of monsoon conditions, impact on the enemy, and ability of the United States to mobilize its aircraft carriers in time. Kissinger approved a follow-up investigation of these questions and asked for a 1-day plan as well. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 103, Vietnam Subject Files, 3-Day Plan for Air Strikes Against North Vietnam Nov 1970)

With respect to North Vietnamese action against U.S. reconnaissance aircraft and this morning's shoot-down, you might wish to:

—Ask Secretary Laird what significance he attaches to this incident (the first shoot-down since May of 1970).

—Ask Secretary Laird why there was no U.S. reaction in light of existing authorities.

—Ask Secretary Laird and Admiral Moorer if they think there should be a reaction.

—If there is no reaction, but enemy anti-aircraft and SAM activity continues against our reconnaissance aircraft, where should we go from here.

67. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) and Secretary of Defense Laird¹

Washington, November 16, 1970, 11:17 a.m.

K: I had an opportunity to talk about the Stennis matter with the President. He doesn't want Cambodia in there.²

L: I will talk to him then and see what we can do.

K: He has no intention—you know his theory.

L: He said perhaps after the election that if Cambodia was strong it would be a reason for compromise.

K: He was very strong on it.

L: We will take that position but we may get beat. Stennis thinks he has to do it. I will tell him we will oppose it.

K: Want me to call him?

L: No. I will tell you if we have to go beyond that.

K: The President is going to call us all together in the next day or two and he will tell Rogers himself.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 7, Chronological File. No classification marking.

² On November 13 at about 6 p.m., Laird called Kissinger to inform him that Senator Stennis wanted to include in the new Appropriations Act language prohibiting U.S. combat ground troops in Cambodia in addition to Laos and Thailand, as was the case in the 1969 Appropriations Act. Kissinger responded: "The President never committed himself not to going back in. He doesn't intend to, but he doesn't want the other side to think we won't." Kissinger told Laird he would check with the President. (Ibid.)

L: Wait until Wed.³ Things leak like a sieve. Even your meetings.

K: I was outraged.

L: No one over here even knows about those meetings.

K: It's awful and makes us look to the Russians like we are putting the arm on them.

L: We put out a battle statement over there and they have for years.

K: He doesn't want it any more.

L: We can't stop it.

K: Some people are keeping their own tally.

L: They have always done it but they are always wrong. When the deaths come out this week it will be 32—not 41. These reporters report on deaths and add totals and always come out wrong.

K: Will you get that straight. If they could be discredited—

L: Our reporters know it. They are always wrong. We can keep telling them our official report is on Thurs.⁴ Our report will be 32.

K: One other point, there was some feeling over here that Adm. Mack on commenting on the pot thing took a hardboiled attitude. "Sure, what are they going to do?" instead of showing concern.

L: I agree. I took care of that. The whole thing is bad.

K: They want to be sure we show concern about that.

L: I want to talk to you about the S. Vietnamese government on that. We have evidence that high officials in the SVN Government are involved in that. I don't know how to handle it. One is visiting here next week. I have shut off the investigators.

K: We will talk about it.

L: It would be bad if it focused.

K: I will see you soon.

³ November 18.

⁴ November 19.

68. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, November 16, 1970.

SUBJECT

Your Meeting with Ambassador Bunker Tuesday, November 17, 1970
at 10:45 a.m.

You are scheduled to meet with Ambassador Bunker Tuesday morning after your session with the Republican Congressional Leadership. This meeting with the Ambassador just before he returns to Saigon from his home leave will give you a good opportunity to reaffirm the main lines of your Vietnam policy and, in particular, to get the Ambassador's views on various political factors that will loom large in the coming months.²

Introduction

—You greatly appreciate the Ambassador's continued willingness to serve his country in his crucial and demanding assignment.

—His experience, insight, and diplomatic skill will be invaluable during the coming months leading up to the 1971 elections in Vietnam.

—You would like today to explore in particular his views on some of the delicate political problems we will be facing.

Vice President Ky and GVN Political Proposals. You will be seeing Ky for breakfast on Tuesday, November 24.³ He is currently touring U.S. military installations and, after his visit with you, he will see former President Johnson and appear on "Meet the Press." As you are aware from my recent memorandum, we have received several reports that Ky is considering various possible political proposals to make to the Communists, including some formulations that would appear to go a long way toward the NLF positions.⁴ While he has discussed this gen-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 150, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, 1 Nov 70. Secret; Sensitive. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² According to the President's Daily Diary, the President met with Bunker on November 17 at the White House from 10:49 to 11:32 a.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files) No further record of the meeting was found.

³ See Document 76.

⁴ Kissinger sent Nixon a memorandum on November 10 reporting that Ky was considering calls for an immediate cease-fire, discussions with the Communists on the modalities of troop withdrawals, legalization of the NLF, and elections for an assembly to draft a new constitution and arrange for national elections. The other report described a meeting between a mid-level GVN official in Paris and a representative of a Vietnamese Communist group in which they discussed the possibility of higher-level talks between

eral subject with Thieu, it is not certain that they have any mutual understanding and Ky's motives are not clear. *I suggest you:*

—ask the Ambassador for his general assessment of Ky and his political intentions; request his suggestions on how to handle your meeting with Ky;

—in particular, solicit the Ambassador's views on what Ky has in mind with regard to possible GVN negotiating proposals and on how closely he is working with Thieu on these issues,⁵

—tell the Ambassador that we plan to be very cautious in any discussions of GVN political proposals that Ky may initiate (the latest information from the South Vietnamese Ambassador here is that Ky does not plan to raise this issue with you but that he might with me);

—instruct Ambassador Bunker to *make clear to Thieu that we will continue to communicate with him directly through Ambassador Bunker on important matters, i.e. we will not filter our views through Vice President Ky.*

1971 Elections in South Vietnam. Next fall will be the crucial elections for the Presidency and the Assembly, and the jockeying in Vietnam and drawing up of slates of candidates will soon begin. Communist strategy will certainly include efforts to sow as much political dissension as possible among the non-Communist elements in South Vietnam and to create friction between Saigon and Washington. We will thus be entering a very demanding diplomatic period and Ambassador Bunker's role will be especially delicate. *I suggest you* ask Ambassador Bunker for his views on:

—the prospects for the elections and the political maneuvering among the various factions during the coming months;

—specifically, the likely Presidential candidates; whether Thieu and Ky can be expected to cooperate or compete; and Thieu's probable plans (he intimated recently that he might consider not running);

—Big Minh's intentions, prospects, and capabilities;

—the U.S. posture toward the elections—i.e., our public position, the impact of our policy actions, and our private responses to Thieu if he should ask our views on his running.

the two sides. Kissinger believed that while nothing concrete emerged from the meeting, it indicated that the GVN was considering significant modifications in its negotiating positions. (Ibid.)

⁵ Kissinger is apparently referring to two meetings between Thieu and Ky in October in which they discussed terms for a political initiative, but did not decide on anything definitive. Helms forwarded reports on the meetings to Kissinger on October 15 and 20, and Kissinger sent them on to Nixon under a November 1 covering memorandum. Kissinger's memoranda and Helms' reports are *ibid.*

Other Subjects. If time permits, you may wish to request Ambassador Bunker's views on the following subjects:

—the pace of Vietnamization and our troop withdrawals after this spring;

—which programs in South Vietnam we should particularly stress, e.g. economic and social programs, anti-corruption, police programs, psychological warfare, land reform;

—the GVN's positions on the provisions of a ceasefire and the likely political and psychological impact if a ceasefire actually takes place.

69. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, November 16, 1970.

SUBJECT

Situation in the Countryside in Vietnam

This memorandum reviews briefly the current situation on the ground in Vietnam and discusses the enemy's strategic options for the dry season.

Recent Pacification Developments

Rainy Season Results—The overall control results (the VSSG measure of pacification progress) are shown on the following chart. (Tab A)

Control is the ability of either the GVN or the Viet Cong to have unimpeded day and night access to the rural population. If the GVN has access in daytime and the VC at night, the hamlet is influenced by both sides.

The control percentages are for South Vietnam's rural population of 10.8 million. Because all of the urban population of 7 million is under GVN control, GVN control in the countryside of 60% at the end of August is equivalent to GVN control of 76% of the total population.

According to the chart, the GVN continued to register control gains through the just-ended rainy season:

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 150, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, 1 Nov 70. Secret. Sent for information. K. Wayne Smith forwarded this memorandum to Kissinger under a November 10 covering memorandum in which he indicated that he had revised it pursuant to Kissinger's request to give more details on the enemy's plans for 1970. He recommended that Kissinger sign it.

—GVN control, which had begun to level off in the 45% to 50% range in late 1969 and early 1970, rose throughout the summer from 50% at the end of April to 60% at the end of August.

This gain was primarily due to the enemy's force diversions from South Vietnam to Cambodia and South Laos, but improved GVN performance also played a role.

GVN control was up 14% in MR 3 (around Saigon) and 13% in MR 2 (the highlands). Three enemy regiments were diverted from the highlands to South Laos and at least four were transferred from MR 3 to Cambodia.

In MR 1 the GVN made steady progress (9%) and in the Delta GVN control advanced 7%.

Dry Season Prospects—Because of continued U.S. redeployments from MRs 1 and 3, no substantial dry season control gains are expected in these areas and improved RVNAF performance should prevent losses.

In MR 2, however, losses are expected due to poor GVN performance, U.S. redeployments, and stepped up enemy activity.

Therefore, if the GVN is to achieve countrywide control gains over the dry season, MR 4 gains will have to offset MR 2 losses.

The prospects for Delta gains are enhanced by the recent appointment of a new MR 4 commander who plans to use his maneuver units to occupy the enemy's key delta base areas. But the enemy can be expected to strongly oppose these actions, so the overall outcome is uncertain.

The Enemy's Recent Strategy

The Enemy's 1970 Plans—According to a high-level defector who attended COSVN's late 1969 PRP Congress, the enemy targets in 1970 were:

—The *Delta* where the enemy's forces were to retake the initiative because "the Delta is South Vietnam's most populous area and the party must control as many people as possible when a ceasefire is declared,"

—The *highlands*, "the areas which possess the greatest military advantage and border on North Vietnam's rear support areas,"

—The *cities*, the centers of political action to exploit the contradictions between the Thieu government and the people; ("during the ceasefire the cities will witness decisive demonstrations, including the demand for the overthrow of the Thieu government.")

The enemy's goals were to:

—Break the back of the pacification program and Vietnamization, and

—*After* the ceasefire is declared, excite the people to overthrow the Thieu government and establish, initially, a coalition government.

Enemy Military Activity—All evidence suggests that, in accordance with his plan, enemy military activity in 1970 has been focused against the pacification program:

—The enemy has launched very few battalion-size attacks in 1970 compared with 1968 and 1969:

	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>
Weekly average of battalion-size attacks	1.98	0.6	0.3

—But small scale attacks have not declined:

	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>
Weekly average of small scale attacks	70.6	71.8	70.0

—And incidents of harassment/terror/and sabotage, a primary anti-pacification tactic, have increased:

	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>
Weekly average of H/T/S incidents	401.7	388.7	446.0

Enemy Force Structure Changes—Moreover, the enemy has systematically downgraded his forces to aid his counter-pacification effort. We have evidence, again in conformance with captured directives, that many (at least seven) enemy regiments and additional separate battalions have been broken down into small units to attack pacification.²

Target Priorities—The distribution of attacks throughout South Vietnam in 1970 shows that the enemy is adhering to his planned target priorities:

—In 1968 and 1969 one-third of the enemy's effort was concentrated in MR 3. But in 1970 he shifted to a political strategy and only one-sixth of his total attacks occurred there.

—In contrast, the share of total enemy attacks that has taken place in MR 2 has risen steadily from one-sixth in 1968 to one-fourth in 1969 to almost one-third in 1970.

—Enemy attacks in MRs 1 and 4 have remained roughly one-fourth each of total attacks.

The Enemy's Dry Season Strategy Choices

We have seen the enemy's protracted war strategy played out for over a year now. It must be as clear to him as it is to us that pacification has not been turned back in MRs 1, 3, and 4. In MR 2 the enemy has achieved important successes and has good opportunities. *But, the inescapable conclusion is that countrywide, pacification has not been turned back.*

² Nixon highlighted this paragraph, underlined the last three lines, and wrote the following in the margin: "A clever strategy."

Despite this failure and despite the unexpected developments in Cambodia, there is as yet no evidence of a fundamental change in the protracted war strategy the enemy embarked on in 1969. The most recent directive, COSVN-27, dated August 28, 1970, (well before your ceasefire initiative) instructed that during the dry season attacks were to be accelerated on all fronts to aid in achieving the goals of complete U.S. withdrawals by June, 1971. We can only make some informed guesses on the enemy's military plans:

—(1) The enemy's first objective will be to restore and protect his supply lines in South Laos and Cambodia. Having moved 26,000 tons of supplies through Sihanoukville between December, 1966, and April, 1969 (in contrast to the CIA's previous estimate of 3,000 to 7,000 tons),³ the enemy must now insure that he can increase his South Laos throughput by at least one-third. He must expand his logistic network in South Laos and set up a new logistic structure in Cambodia and deploy forces to protect both.

—(2) The second dry season task facing the enemy is the requirement to prevent the loss of his base areas in MRs 3 and 4. He must protect his threatened military assets in this, the most densely populated area of South Vietnam, to insure the credibility of his ultimate political demands and tie down RVNAF resources.

Besides these essential tasks, the enemy will almost certainly attempt to go on the offensive. His offensive choices boil down to attacks:

- in western Cambodia,
- in MR 2 to turn back pacification, threaten Vietnamization, and/or hold territory in anticipation of a political settlement,
- in Northern Laos to intimidate and possibly overrun the RLG.

The Enemy's Strategy and Ceasefire

Further adjustments in the enemy's strategy, for example possible enemy acceptance of a ceasefire, probably await the resolution of three major uncertainties.

The first is Cambodia and only after the dry season and a possible Cambodian enemy offensive will it be clear to Hanoi whether its position has been seriously hurt by the emergence of the Lon Nol government.

The second uncertainty is U.S. withdrawals. After another 100,000 U.S. troops have left by May 1, 1971, Hanoi will be in a position to see what it will take to defeat Vietnamization and decide whether it is willing to pay the price.

Lastly, the enemy is probably not yet convinced that the "fraud" of pacification cannot be turned back, even though he must now have serious doubts.

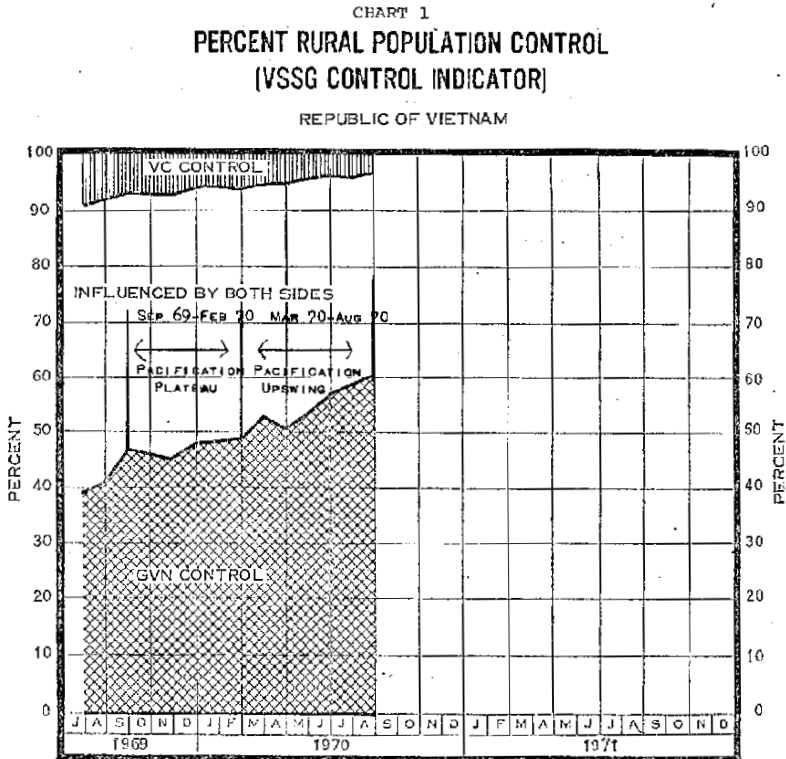
³ See Document 62.

None of these uncertainties should remain after the dry season. It is possible that, whatever the dry season outcome, the enemy could well try to negotiate a ceasefire against accelerated U.S. redeployments and a fixed U.S. withdrawal date:

—If the enemy does poorly in the dry season and is on the verge of losing his base areas in the Delta, he could seek a ceasefire to halt his decline and switch the struggle into the political arena before the September, 1971, Presidential election. He might try this, particularly if he believed he could obtain the concession of accelerated and complete U.S. withdrawals and prevent a possible collapse in VCI morale or their exposure to GVN reprisals.

—If the enemy does well in the dry season, his case at the bargaining table will be strengthened. Paradoxically, however, this would probably make it less likely that he would seek a ceasefire because his military prospects would encourage him to continue fighting rather than bear the risks of a ceasefire. But he would still want to remove the threat posed by the continued presence of U.S. combat forces. If he thought a ceasefire would help do this, he would give it serious consideration.

Tab A



70. Editorial Note

On November 18, 1970, President Richard Nixon sent a “Special Message to the Congress Proposing Supplemental Foreign Assistance Appropriations” totaling \$1.035 billion. The request included \$65 million for Vietnam to replace funds which would have been otherwise spent in Vietnam by the Department of Defense and U.S. forces who were being withdrawn on a more accelerated schedule and to prevent an economic collapse in South Vietnam. Also included was \$155 million (\$85 million in military grant assistance and \$70 million for economic support) for Cambodia. (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pages 1074–1079)

In a meeting with the Republican Congressional leadership on the morning of November 17, President Nixon and his Special Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry Kissinger made the case for this “must” legislation. Kissinger explained that the purpose of the \$65 million for Vietnam “is to replace dollars which would otherwise be spent by American Forces which are being withdrawn on a more rapid timetable and to prevent an economic collapse of the Saigon Government which is dependent upon the inflow of these dollars. Kissinger here stopped, interrupted to point out that the ARVN had today captured 10 miles inside Cambodia the largest arms cache we had ever made in Cambodia. Another element of the request said Henry Kissinger was \$85 million for grant military assistance to Cambodia. It’s for small arms; the kind of usable equipment which Cambodia needs and can employ in its own efforts. Kissinger said we are not making the Cambodian army a small model of the American army which is a mistake we made in the early years of the Vietnam War. Kissinger noted that almost all the troops now fighting in Cambodia against Cambodian forces were North Vietnamese not V.C., that Cambodia was right now, that Cambodian Armed Forces were tying up three North Vietnamese Divisions—and her Division has been pulled out of South Vietnam—out of the Central Highlands into Southern Laos or South Vietnam—to protect the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Kissinger now gave a bit of startling information. He said that from the bills of lading we have now determined that the amount of enemy military equipment brought into South Vietnam through Cambodia from the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville is ten times the lowest estimate that we have made and 2½ times the greatest estimate. He said we now ascertain that 90% of the arms, ammunition and equipment for III and IV Corps areas came out of Sihanoukville through Cambodia and 75% of the equipment for II Corps area came from Cambodia out of Sihanoukville. Kissinger then went on to detail the importance of American military assistance to Cambodia. He said that Sir Robert Thompson who had been over there

said, formerly the United States used to get about fifteen cents for every dollar in terms of military effectiveness; whereas in Cambodia we're getting ninety cents on the dollar. He said that that would be a correct analogy. Every dollar put into the Cambodian effort enables them to keep fighting as long as possible and enables us to continue withdrawing American troops. Henry said the request contained an additional \$100 million to replace our borrowings from military assistance programs for Taiwan, Turkey and Greece. We had borrowed for Cambodia, he said, this \$100 million is needed to replenish that. The President here interjected to say that two critical things about his Cambodian decision that should not go unnoticed. First, the North Vietnamese Divisions are being tied down by the Cambodian Army right now. They are fighting and that is a direct result of the Cambodian action. Secondly, we have cut off the main source of enemy supplies—Sihanoukville. The President here noted that in 1967, Congressman Chamberlain of Michigan had told him that the bulk of enemy arms and equipment was coming through Sihanoukville and what could we do about it. The President said he had come down and talked to the State Department and they had said it was only a trickle. He said their intelligence was dead wrong; it's not any better now, but we do know in retrospect just how much has come through Sihanoukville and just how right Congressman Chamberlain was. This indicates the extent of influence a single Congressman can have on American foreign policy and that the Cambodian front is a result of what the Cambodians are doing and American lives are being saved. Let's make the case that way. The Vice President here interjected two points. He said that when he had talked to Lon Nol they made two points that they felt were significant and differences between the Cambodian Government and his fight against Communism and that of the South Vietnamese. First, the Cambodians can own land whereas the South Vietnamese could not. This makes a significant difference in terms of support for the present regime. Secondly, in South Vietnam the clergy is generally concentrated in the cities; it is urban oriented; it is intellectually based; whereas in Cambodia the clergy which has tremendous influence over the populace is generally from the rural areas. It has its roots in the soil; it's much closer to the Cambodian people; there would be far less likelihood of a general alienation from the mainstream of Cambodian life by the clergy there. Far greater than there is in South Vietnam, for example. Senator Scott asked the President what was our CIA capability; was it any good and the President described it as 'pitiful.' He said we are trying to do something about it. The Vice President again asked Henry Kissinger to compare the cost of Vietnam right now as compared with 1968. Kissinger indicated that well, perhaps it was \$28 billion a year in 1968. It's down to about \$14 billion right now. Senator Scott indicated when this military assistance request hit the Senate—

those who would try to make names for themselves on the Democratic side were bound to grab it and run with it. Kissinger here interjected the statement that if they provide \$500 million for Israel and not the rest for Southeast Asia, I would feel it would be my duty not to spend the money for Israel; 'that's cold turkey.' The President repeated his statement, I will not ask for money for Israel unless we can do it worldwide, he said, let's make that very clear. The President repeated this statement, I will not ask for money. The President indicated that there was an absolute lock on public discussion until 10:00 am tomorrow morning. The President then discussed the basic need for each one of them. In Cambodia, for example, he said we are sending money, and pulling out men. He said, 'sell it that way.' In Korea, the same is true, we can't possibly pull our 50 thousand troops out unless we can modernize the Korean army. Now, do they want to modernize it or not, do they want to pull out the troops or not?" (Memorandum for the President's File by Buchanan, November 17; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 83, Memoranda for the President, Beginning November 15, 1970)

On November 18 at 3:40 p.m., Nixon, Kissinger, Secretary of State William Rogers, and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird met with Senators Hugh Scott, Mike Mansfield, and Richard Russell to discuss the supplemental request. The discussion on Vietnam and Cambodia was as follows:

"Secretary Rogers then indicated that new aid for Vietnam and Cambodia were all part of Vietnamization and necessary to continue that program, which was working well. In addition, we wanted \$13 million for Indonesia. Secretary Laird added the detailed figures that we were seeking for Southeast Asia and noted that the diversion of North Vietnamese troops to Cambodia is much cheaper for us to handle than if they remained in South Vietnam.

"Senator Russell interjected that he would certainly support such a request if it enabled other countries to take on the burden of their defense themselves.

"The President replied that, in the Indonesian case, the issue was internal security. Suharto was thinking of Indonesian needs, and rejected any notions of foreign adventures. In response to the President's question whether the Indonesian aid was in line with Indonesia's request, Secretaries Rogers and Laird answered affirmatively.

"The President then noted that Cambodia was the part of the package that would trouble some people. There will be fears of new US involvement, that we are trying to bail out of a situation which we should not have entered in the first place. Our Cambodian action, however, now appears to be enormously in the US interests. For example, it has choked off the enormous supply of equipment through Sihanoukville

which had been the mainstay of the North Vietnamese supplies in South Vietnam.

“The President continued that the Southeast Asian/Korean package is part of the Nixon Doctrine. We wanted to let others do the job themselves; we wanted to get out ourselves. But we must remember the assistance part of the Doctrine. These countries are not going to be building up military machines of their own. We hope that Vietnam and Cambodia will become lesser burdens over time to us. We now see this as the best road in that area.

“Senator Scott asked whether Cambodia was not developing a war machine. The President replied that in fact Cambodia’s military operation was rather lean. Secretary Laird concurred, and added that we were proposing a reasonable investment in Cambodia’s military. They were making an all-out effort, and had done well so far. The aid will go for ammunition, small arms, trucks, and the like. It will provide no aircraft, helicopters, or other heavy equipment.

“Concerning the restoration of funds to programs from which money was borrowed for urgent need in Cambodia and elsewhere, Secretary Laird noted that we should honor our commitments. We had told the recipient countries about the size of their programs, and thus needed to restore funds to implement them. Senator Scott added that this also was a Congressional commitment, because Congress had voted the country funds too.” (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 314, Subject Files, Congress (Mtgs, Rqsts for Info, Agreements, Testimony, Executive Privilege, etc.) Vol. I)

The supplemental passed the Senate on December 16, but Senator J. William Fulbright refused to allow it to go to a conference committee for a final vote. In a December 21 memorandum to Nixon, Kissinger noted that Senator Frank Church offered to break the impasse if Rogers sent him a letter confirming that the funds would not be used for U.S. troops or advisers in Cambodia. Nixon agreed and Rogers sent the letter prior to December 23. (Ibid., Box 318, Subject Files, Cooper–Church Amendment [May 70–Oct 71]) The Senate passed the bill on December 28, minus \$25 million that the administration requested to reimburse funds it had taken from other countries’ accounts and used for Cambodia. (*Congress and the Nation, 1969–1972, Volume III, pages 912–913*)

71. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, November 18, 1970.

SUBJECT

Your Meeting with Secretaries Rogers and Laird, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Moorer, and Henry A. Kissinger at 11:30 a.m., November 18, 1970

Background

You are scheduled to meet with Secretary Rogers, Secretary Laird, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Moorer and me in your office on Wednesday, November 18 at 11:30 a.m. to discuss the two forthcoming military operations planned for execution on Saturday, November 21st and Sunday, November 22d Saigon time.²

The first operation involves the rescue of up to 60 U.S. prisoners of war from a POW compound in North Vietnam. The date of execution of the rescue operation will determine the execution date for the second operation which consists of retaliatory air strikes against anti-aircraft installations, choke points and supply installations along North Vietnam's border with Laos. Although the preferred date of the rescue operation is now scheduled for midnight Saturday, November 21st, a five-day "window" has been established which, depending on weather conditions could result in the execution of the rescue operation on either Friday the 20th, Saturday the 21st (the preferred date), Sunday the 22d, Monday the 23d or Tuesday the 24th. The retaliatory strikes will be launched at first light of day following the rescue operation or approximately six hours later.³

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 87, Vietnam Subject Files, North Vietnam Raid 11 Nov 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. Drafted by Kissinger and Haig.

² According to the President's Daily Diary, the meeting was held on November 18 at the White House from 11:28 a.m. to 12:38 p.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files) In his diary entry for November 18, Haldeman noted, "[resident] had long secret meeting with Laird, Rogers, Moorer, and K[issinger] about a new secret plan to try to rescue 90 POWs, we'll try it Saturday." (*The Haldeman Diaries*, p. 211) No other record of the meeting has been found.

³ Moorer ordered McCain to execute a 1-day strike, not the 3-day strike that Abrams had prepared, against anti-aircraft sites, supply stockpiles, and vehicles on and near the Mu Gia, Ban Karai, and Ban Raving areas of North Vietnam, with a possible second day of strikes if the first proved productive. The 1-day strikes, codenamed Freedom Bait, occurred November 20–21 (Washington time). Three waves of attacks were planned, but the last one was cancelled due to poor weather. As a result, while the raids against the logistical targets were successful, the anti-aircraft sites were not appreciably impaired, even though they were hit. (*History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam, 1969–1970*, p. 224)

Purpose of the Meeting

The meeting is designed to accomplish the following:

—Initial notification of the Secretary of State about the fact of the two operations.⁴

—A detailed briefing for you on the operational details and scope of the two operations, and

—Your final approval of the operations.

Conduct of the Meeting

Since this is the first indication that Secretary Rogers will have of both operations, the manner in which the discussion is launched should be delicately considered.

I suggest you adopt the following procedure:

—Inform the group that Secretary Laird has developed a bold scheme for the rescue of some U.S. POWs held by the North Vietnamese. You have asked Secretary Laird to have the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff present the details of that plan.

—Related to the rescue operation is the fact that the North Vietnamese have shot down one of our unarmed reconnaissance planes in the vicinity of the Ban Karai Pass in North Vietnam and have, on several occasions before and after the shootdown, fired at other unarmed reconnaissance flights. For this reason, you have asked the Secretary of Defense to prepare a retaliatory strike against anti-aircraft weapons, SAM sites and logistics installations along North Vietnam's border with Laos. Because the security of the rescue operation is so important, you have deferred retaliation for the reconnaissance plane shootdown pending possible execution of the rescue operation.

—You should then ask Secretary Laird and the Chairman to present to the group a briefing on both plans. Secretary Laird will ask the Chairman to conduct the briefing on the rescue operation followed by a briefing on the protective reaction strikes.

At the conclusion of the briefings you should instruct me to convene the senior members of the WSAG sometime Thursday or Friday to develop a detailed public line game plan for both operations.⁵

⁴ In a November 17 memorandum to Kissinger, Haig recommended that Kissinger: "Fix with the President whether or not he wants to break the news to Rogers privately before the meeting of the whole group or concurrently during that meeting." Kissinger indicated that he discussed the matter with Nixon. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 336, Subject Files, Items to Discuss with the President, 8 September 70–December 70)

⁵ No record of a meeting was found. In a November 19 memorandum to Kissinger, Haig wrote that the "public affairs aspects of this weekend's two operations in North Vietnam pose complex and difficult problems which must be carefully considered to

Attached at Tab A are suggested talking points for your conduct of the meeting.⁶

limit damage here at home while fully exploiting the advantages of the operations." He added that since Rogers excluded himself from involvement in this aspect at the November 18 meeting, Kissinger should work out basic decisions with Laird and Moorer before discussing the issue with other key officials in the White House, Defense Department, and MACV. (Ibid., Box 87, Vietnam Subject Files, North Vietnam Raid 11 Nov 1970)

⁶ Attached but not printed. On November 19, Nixon wrote the following note to Laird: "Mel, As I told Moorer after our meeting yesterday, regardless of results, the men on this project have my complete backing and there will be no second guessing if the plan fails. It is worth the risk and the planning is superb. I will be at Camp David Saturday—I would like for you to call me as soon as you have anything to report." (Note attached to memorandum from Haig to Kissinger, November 23; *ibid.*, Box 106, Kissinger Office Files, Country Files, Far East, Vietnam, Recon Flights, Viet 1968 Understanding, 2 of 2)

72. Editorial Note

On November 20, 1970, at approximately 11:30 p.m., Vietnam time, a joint team of United States Army and Air Force special forces launched Operation King Pin, the new code name for the mission to rescue U.S. prisoners of war in the Son Tay prisoner camp 23 miles outside of Hanoi. The team was taken in by helicopter from Thailand, landed in the prison yard, killed a number of guards, and pulled out less than a half-hour later, but no prisoners were in the camp. The prisoners of war had been moved during the summer because of flooding. Planning for the mission had begun nearly 6 months earlier, when U.S. intelligence had identified the location of the camp and the Joint Chiefs of Staff formed a 15-man study group under Air Force Brigadier General Donald D. Blackburn to investigate the possibility of staging a rescue. The mission team was put together in August under the leadership of Brigadier General Leroy Manor, U.S. Air Force, overall commander, and Colonel Arthur Simons, U.S. Army, ground commander, and training began later that month for what then was code-named Operation Ivory Coast.

The President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry Kissinger, called U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, at 6:30 p.m. on November 20 to discuss the operation, how the administration would announce it, and the series of protective reaction strikes against North Vietnam that were planned to begin on November 20:

"K[issinger]: It was a dry hole. Confirmed now.

"J[ohnson]: That's that then.

“K: The other problem is and the press line is nothing. Everything will go to Defense. If the other operation goes you should let Bruce know what it is. Not this first part. No need for me to do it.

“J: You never told him about the other one. You will have confirmation on it.

“K: In 15 mins.

“J: Plan still for DOD statement tomorrow?

“K: That’s right or as soon as Hanoi screams.

“J: No, the other operation.

“K: Either tomorrow morning or if Hanoi screams in the middle of the night.

“J: We will have confirmation?

“K: Within the hour. Draft something and hold it until we get word. We don’t want too many aborts.

“J: I have been doing some research and what happened the last time. That was smothered by Cambodia. They postponed the meeting a week following that. They made some statements and we did in Paris. We didn’t do anything else.

“K: I don’t think we should make much of it.

“J: No. I just wanted to review what we have done previously. That’s the record. I will get something ready on a contingency basis for Bruce.

“K: Abrams will brief Bunker.”

“J: What a disappointment.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 7, Chronological File)

Given a later portion of this conversation, which is not printed, the “other problem” Kissinger refers to is probably the unsuccessful attempt by the Soviet Union to establish a submarine base at Cienfuegos on the southern coast of Cuba in the autumn of 1970. See *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XII, Soviet Union, January 1969–October 1970, Documents 207, 208, 210–215, 219–226, and 228.

73. **Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon**¹

Washington, November 21, 1970.

SUBJECT

Preliminary Report on Operation King Pin

Attached at Tab A² is the preliminary report from the field on the operation which attempted to rescue American POWs in North Vietnam. Highlights of the report are as follows:

Summary of Operations

—The task force launched and proceeded to the objective precisely according to plan, going the entire distance apparently undetected by enemy radar.

—The diversionary air forces were tracked and North Vietnamese MIGs reacted as they approached the North Vietnamese boundary; SA-2 missiles were also launched and damaged two F-105s—the crew from one of these planes ejected over Laos.

—The task force left according to plan except for two helicopters which rescued the downed F-105 crew in good condition; a MIG apparently attacked one of the helicopters which took successful evasive action.

—There were no friendly casualties during the entire operation except for two minor injuries.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 87, Vietnam Subject Files, North Vietnam Raid 11 Nov 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information. The memorandum was attached as Tab A to a November 23 memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon briefing him for his meeting that day with the leaders of Operation King Pin. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen." According to the President's Daily Diary, Nixon met with the leaders on November 23 from 4:58 to 6:05 p.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files) He also presented medals to the team members in a public ceremony at the White House on November 25. The text of Nixon's remarks is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, p. 1081.

² Attached at Tab A, not printed, is a retyped copy of a message from Manor to Moorer and McCain, November 21, describing the operation. In summing up, Manor wrote: "The courage demonstrated by these truly outstanding individuals who participated in and over the objective area is admirable and I am personally convinced, beyond any doubt, that this force would have recovered all the POWs in that prison had they been there, as reported, upon assignment of the mission."

Activities in the Objective Area

—A thorough search of the buildings and surrounding area turned up no prisoners; it confirmed that the compound had in fact been a prison, though not used recently for this purpose.³

—Portions of the buildings were used to billet North Vietnamese military personnel.

—Five enemy soldiers within the compound were killed and two additional ones were killed near the entrance while attempting to escape; further contact was made with the enemy during the sweep near the compound with unknown results.

—A search of the support buildings resulted in two and possibly more enemy casualties.

—A foot bridge and a highway bridge were bombed.

—Except for small arms fire from the vicinity of Son Tay city no fire was received in the objective area.

—The task group carried out their mission in a highly professional manner and would have recovered any prisoners if they had been there.⁴

³ In a December 4 memorandum to Helms outlining the CIA's role in the operation, Carver noted that the CIA had indications on November 20 that the POWs had been moved and that reconnaissance photos from November 6 showed unexplainable variations in vegetation at the camp. Carver immediately contacted General Blackburn about the evidence, but Blackburn responded that the "raid was then in train." Carver also spoke on November 23 with Laird who acknowledged that he had also seen the information but decided to proceed with the operation anyway. (Central Intelligence Agency, NIC Files: Job 80–R01720R, GAC Chrono, Oct 70–Dec 70)

⁴ In a November 27 memorandum to Nixon, Kissinger summarized a report from General Walters on a meeting he had with a source who was close to the North Vietnamese, but whose accuracy he could not evaluate. According to the source, Hanoi had no advance knowledge of the raid, had since regrouped many of their prisoners in the Hanoi area, were upset but intended to "play it low-key for prestige reasons." Additionally, accompanying airstrikes hit supplies stockpiled in the open nearby. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 150, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, 1 Nov 70)

74. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, November 21, 1970, 11:45 a.m.

K: I just wanted to bring you up to date on a few things. Hanoi radio starting reporting massive air attacks. Their radar probably picked up Commando raid and they are picking up diversionary strikes. Said we attacked one of our own PW camps. Laird is issuing a short statement.² I worked with Laird and I talked with Rogers³ so we are all on board, that we didn't hit anything south of the 19th parallel and caused by fact that they were hitting some of our unarmed reconnaissance planes and this was done in protection. Talking about saying something about the Commando operation but they would just say it was another Bay of Pigs and decided not to say anything about it.

P: I don't want anyone to say anything. There is no point to say anything about it.

K: This morning in Paris the North Vietnamese delegation called a press conference and the delegation said the strikes threatened success of the conference. They stated no conclusions. They maybe will cancel one meeting.

P: Will Bruce say anything. He could step up and say we don't care if they cancel all the meetings. They are not getting anywhere.

K: At 11:30 this morning Laird put out a statement saying that the strikes were ending at 6 p.m. today and second, no air attacks on PW camps and holding them solely accountable for American lives. The other operation went beautifully, except no one was there. They killed 5 guards.

P: Guards were still there. Why would they have guards there if there were no prisoners. Do you suppose they could have hidden them underground?

K: Guards or caretakers but they were military personnel. If they had hidden them they would have been expecting us and hit us with a buzz saw.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 7, Chronological File. No classification marking. A typewritten notation on the first page reads, "(paraphrased)."

² The text of Laird's statement on the air strikes on North Vietnam is in telegram 191289 to all diplomatic and consular posts, November 21. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 87, Vietnam)

³ Kissinger spoke with Laird from 9:45 to 10:10 a.m., and with Rogers at 11:20 a.m. on November 21. (Ibid., Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 7, Chronological File)

P: Why do the military guard the place if no one is there.

K: Just to keep the natives from moving in or perhaps just to move people through. It was damn bad luck. The whole operation worked exactly as they planned. The weather is so bad that we are not getting photo reconnaissance on the areas hit. But the visual reports say that we are doing a lot of damage.

P: What do you mean visual reports?

K: The visual reports of the pilots. When they are going over on bombing missions they look and try to determine amount of damage while they are bombing. However, photo recon would be better.

P: When will we get those reports. Well it doesn't matter. There is no reason to believe that they weren't successful. On this other operation I want you to hold right to the line and do not discuss it at all. No comment whatsoever. This is the way it is going to be.

K: I will call Laird and tell him that.

P: He knows that. What do they want to talk about it for?

K: They would like to crow about it a little bit. It was a beautifully executed operation deep into enemy territory and their office had a lot to do with it. They are pretty close to the situation to see the importance of not talking about it.

P: We will recognize them and let them know we thought they did a good job. We won't talk about it now but later we will explain what happened. Get that Col. back here. Get in a group of them. Get Defense to work on similar actions. They must have some others but thought they would get turned down so didn't propose them. We are going to be out of there in a year so we can do some of these things. What do we care.

K: I have already told Moorer.

P: Proves that something can be done. We need more schemes of this sort. For the past 5 years no schemes because nobody approved them. Well we will approve them. We only have one year left.

K: Hanoi screaming because they are shaking a bit.

P: . . . say we attacked a PW camp . . .

K: Haiphong and Hanoi. Probably shows up on their radar.

P: Do not say that we will leave it out that we might bomb these. Keep them guessing.

K: Did bomb only south of the 19th parallel so that later if they claim we bombed a PW camp we can hold them responsible. However, we did not say we were not going to.

P: Was anybody hurt?

K: 2 slightly injured. But we went in 20 miles from Hanoi Mr. President.

P: Slightly injured. That's pretty good. Do you think the prisoners were there and underground.

K: They of course would say no. If they had any reason they would have known that we were coming and radio seemed to indicate that they did not know what was going on.

P: Why don't we put some of the South Vietnamese on this type of operation. They have a big army. Scare the hell out of these people.

K: Certainly. Now that they have seen that we can do it they are probably doing a lot of thinking. To land 20 miles from their capital and get out does not reassure them.

P: The failure will not be discussed. . . . successful operation. We went in to see if there were any there and got rid of the guards. . . . other operations being planned.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

P: The guys did a hell of a job. We would like to look for another one. How many PWs do they have?

K: Camp or not . . . Have 400 with several hundred missing.

P: This is the only major initiative to negotiate. What will they do with them if we don't negotiate and just pull out, kill them?

K: Oh, no. We would go back to bombing the living daylights out of them.

P: 7 day strike so that we do not have to maintain the tension during all that time. As you recall 7 day strike hitting complexes up there would give them a blow that would set them back several months.

K: Working on mining plan now.

P: Mining plan provides it seems to me a good possibility and has liability of international argument—hospital, etc. What we need is more imagination in some of the things we can do now. There will be no incentive for us to have a negotiated settlement after March is over. After that war is ended.

K: But we can say that anyway.

P: Good thing to add to the protective reaction. All eyes on the PW thing if it hadn't had the protective reaction bombings. We do not talk about PW thing. We will talk about it later and tell what happened.

K: Unsuccessful attempt to rescue. However, it worked great with it in conjunction with the strikes.

P: It should be handled basically as a rescue mission. I do not want it described—that would endanger the others.

K: Daring attempt at . . .

P: I do not want it described. It was just one of our routine (what do you call them?) search and rescue operations. Tell Laird to stonewall it right through. And I want them to come up with some other plan.

K: We will get the Col. back and get him to report.

P: They must have others. They must have others.

K: Pentagon, you hit it correctly, gave up because they never got it approved.

75. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, November 23, 1970.

SUBJECT

First Bruce–Xuan Thuy Private Talks

Ambassador Bruce's report on his first private meeting with Xuan Thuy, which took place on November 16,² indicates that the meeting was used to reiterate the known positions of both sides. Contrary to previous practice, Xuan Thuy did not produce a three-hour lecture. Instead, there was a good deal of give and take.³

Xuan Thuy made the following principal points:

—The modalities of a cease-fire can not be implemented until political and military problems have been settled and an agreement signed.

—The U.S. should set a date for its troop withdrawal. If it does not like the date of June 30, 1971, which the PRG had proposed, it should suggest another date.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 189, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks Aug 70–. Secret; Nodis; Paris Meetings; Plus. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen." Holdridge sent the memorandum to Kissinger under a November 18 covering memorandum and recommended that he sign it.

² Bruce proposed having the meeting in telegram USDEL 14091 from Paris, October 15, to follow up on Nixon's proposals in his October 7 speech. Smyser informed Kissinger about the proposed meeting in an October 15 memorandum and Kissinger approved it, but Kissinger wrote to Nixon in an October 22 memorandum that while Xuan Thuy had agreed to meet he could not commit to a specific date. Nixon wrote a note on the memorandum instructing Bruce to "delay—be hard to reach—don't agree to a meeting too soon." (All *ibid.*)

³ Bruce met with Xuan Thuy at the DRV Delegation House in Paris. A report on the discussion was sent in telegram USDEL 15858 from Paris, November 16. (*Ibid.*)

—The PRG will not deal with the present government in Saigon; therefore, so long as the U.S. supports that government, there can be no settlement.

—We should discuss military and political problems together.

—The DRV is prepared to respect the outcome of a political process in South Vietnam. (This is the first time the Communists have specifically made that commitment.)

—Reconnaissance flights over North Vietnam are a violation of North Vietnamese sovereignty.

—Ambassador Bruce should also meet privately with the PRG.

Ambassador Bruce made the following main points:

—We are ready to negotiate a cease-fire.

—We believe there should be an immediate and unconditional release of all POW's.

—We are not prepared to discuss political issues without the participation of the GVN, though we will listen to DRV proposals. The issues which the other side has raised regarding political settlement are primarily the business of the South Vietnamese people. They cannot be settled by the U.S. and the DRV themselves.

—The DRV had agreed to negotiate with the GVN and is now backing off from that agreement.

—Bruce will certainly not meet separately with the PRG.

—We are prepared to consider any reasonable timetable for complete troop withdrawals, but such a timetable depends on the resolution of other issues involved in an overall settlement for Indochina. Among those issues is the disposition of North Vietnamese forces outside North Vietnam—including Laos and Cambodia.

—The reconnaissance flights over North Vietnam are necessary to assure the safety of our allied forces, and the DRV had understood that at the time of the bombing halt.

At the end of the meeting, Ambassador Bruce said he would like to review the record and to meet again next week. Xuan Thuy said he also wished to review the record but did not wish to fix a date for the meeting. He said his liaison officers would be in touch with ours.

Comment: The tone of the meeting was relatively restrained throughout, although there were some sharp exchanges. The substance was about as we expected, with the North Vietnamese restating their known positions and preconditions. There were no hints of any readiness to change, although it is noteworthy that Thuy for the first time said they would accept the results of the political process.

It is also noteworthy that Thuy asked for our proposed withdrawal deadline. The North Vietnamese may be hoping that they can push us

into accepting the principle of a deadline by showing some flexibility on the date itself.

There have been some intelligence indicators, such as diplomatic message volume and VIP travel, which suggest that Hanoi may be planning some new diplomatic move in the near future. But we have no indications when that move might come or what kind of move it will be. It could be designed to move the talks forward. It could also merely be intended to increase the political pressures for settlement in the U.S. and South Vietnam. Or it could be related to a truce proposal for the Christmas-New Year season.

It is uncertain whether and when Thuy will ask for another meeting. The North Vietnamese have in the past not asked for private meetings, but have left the initiative to us. Thuy may decide to let us wait a while, particularly since he probably felt that Bruce had taken a hard line.

76. Memorandum for the President's File¹

Washington, November 24, 1970.

PARTICIPANTS

The President
Mr. Henry A. Kissinger
Under Secretary of State John N. Irwin, II
Deputy Assistant Secretary William H. Sullivan
Mr. John H. Holdridge

Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, Republic of Vietnam
Ambassador Bui Diem, Republic of Vietnam

SUBJECT

The President's Discussion with Vice President Ky on Developments Related to Vietnam

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, President's Office Files, Memorandums for the President, Beginning 11/22/70. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. The meeting occurred in the White House and ran from 8:31 to 10:09 a.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) Holdridge forwarded a copy of this memorandum to Kissinger under a November 25 covering memorandum, recommending that he approve it. Kissinger approved. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 150, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 1 Nov 70) Ky arrived in the United States on November 15 for a 17-day visit. (*The New York Times*, November 16, 1970, p. A10)

The President referred to the U.S. rescue operation directed against a North Vietnamese POW camp, and expressed regrets that this operation had failed. Vice President Ky agreed, and complimented the members of the U.S. team on their bravery. He noted the difficulty of locating a site such as the POW camp, especially at night, and suggested that Vietnamese who knew the country and the people might be able to help out in operations such as this. In fact, the location of the POW camp happened to be his own hometown. U.S.-GVN cooperation in rescue missions might help assure their success, and the Vice President offered to arrange for Vietnamese volunteers. The GVN had teams operating in North Vietnam, and if one of these teams were put into the vicinity of a POW camp shortly before an operation was planned it would be able to look over the area, make contacts with the people, and report back whether or not POWs were still there. The President expressed interest in Vice President Ky's offer.

Ambassador Sullivan referred to the North Vietnamese reaction to the U.S. raids on North Vietnam as being rather mild. Although they had refused to attend the November 25 meeting, they had insisted that the next meeting on December 3 proceed as scheduled. The President said that this tended to confirm his impression that the North Vietnamese did not want to break off the Paris talks. They were playing a game with us in Paris, in that by simply agreeing to talk they had gotten us to halt our bombings. However, if they actually did break off the talks we would have the opportunity of reversing a move which had been instituted by the previous Administration.

The President mentioned in passing that we had failed on this one, but that we would go back again in a month or two and next time we would succeed.

Under Secretary Irwin referred to the depth of feeling about the POWs on the part of wives and next of kin, observing that a group of wives had called on him and had been very emotional. They were coming very close to accusing the Administration of not doing enough on behalf of the POWs. The President acknowledged this attitude, saying that all we had been really doing so far was to talk about the problem. The rescue operation was intended to go beyond mere talk.

The President, Vice President Ky, and Ambassador Sullivan all agreed that the North Vietnamese attitude toward POWs was quite different from that of our own. Ambassador Sullivan explained that a North Vietnamese who was captured was considered to have disgraced himself, and the North Vietnamese thus could not understand why we expressed such concern over our own POWs. He recalled, too, that after the fighting with the French, Vietnamese who had been released from French prison camps were given a year of indoctrination before being allowed to return to normal Vietnamese society. Vice President

Ky wondered if the kind of air surveillance our side usually laid on prior to POW rescue missions might tip our hands to the North Vietnamese. It would take but a few minutes for them to remove prisoners from a camp which appeared scheduled to be hit.

Vice President Ky stated that he had discussed with President Thieu the possibility of the GVN's offering to release all 30,000 Communist POWs it held in exchange for the 300 U.S. POWs held by North Vietnam.² He did this in part because as an airman he felt a bond of brotherhood with the U.S. POWs, all of whom were airmen, and also because an offer of this sort would put the North Vietnamese on the spot. If they accepted it, the U.S. POWs would be freed and there would be no problem as he saw it in returning the Communist POWs. While in GVN prison camps they actually enjoyed a better life than did the average ARVN soldier. They would carry a good story with them when they returned to North Vietnam. (Ambassador Sullivan pointed out that there were about 9,000 North Vietnamese among the POWs held by the GVN, and Vice President Ky observed that the ratio of North Vietnamese to U.S. POWs was still a very good one.) According to Vice President Ky, there had been no decision reached by Thieu on this matter, and Thieu had asked that it be passed along while Vice President Ky was in Washington.

Turning to the military situation, the President said that we had the greatest of admiration for what the ARVN had accomplished lately, not only in its operations in Cambodia but in its general level of competence. The ARVN had come a long way. Vice President Ky agreed, noting that his military colleagues also felt that the ARVN performance had improved greatly. There were, however, still deficiencies in leadership and a shortage of cadres. Speaking very frankly, there were also morale problems arising from ARVN dissatisfaction over living standards. These living standards were lower than those of the rest of the South Vietnamese society, which made the members of the ARVN very unhappy. Vice President Ky was confident that the ARVN's morale was strong enough to keep on fighting the Communists, but its unhappiness over living conditions would persist, and would need to be dealt with as an urgent matter.

The President asked Vice President Ky for an appraisal of what the Communists might do in the coming dry season. What was the significance of the heavy enemy infiltration which we had noticed

² Kissinger approved a plan by the Department of State, transmitted to him in a November 9 memorandum from Smyser, to instruct the Embassy in Saigon to begin exploring the possibility of having the South Vietnamese release a sizeable number of POWs before Christmas. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 150, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 1 Nov 70)

recently? Vice President Ky expressed the opinion that the Communists would try to hit Cambodia hard, rather than attack in South Vietnam. They needed to reopen their supply lines to southern South Vietnam to get food and supplies to their men there, hence the infiltration. Access to South Vietnam remained their most important consideration. Vice President Ky doubted, though, that they would want to attack Phnom Penh directly or attempt to destroy the Cambodian Government. If they did try to do so, the ARVN had plans to help. He had discussed Cambodian-ARVN cooperation himself with Prime Minister Lon Nol. As Vice President Ky put it, the Cambodian-Vietnamese relationship was "like lips and teeth," and they would work very closely together. If the ARVN did move in to help keep Cambodian LOCs open or to relieve the enemy pressure on the Cambodian forces, there might be an enemy diversionary attack in I Corps, but this could be handled. Cambodia had been a real turning point in the war. The President was gratified to hear this, and also to hear Vice President Ky's optimistic appraisal of the Cambodian Government's ability to hold out.

The President expressed the opinion that the Cambodian forces had improved remarkably since last May. Ambassador Sullivan commented that under the French, Cambodian units had been among the best in the French forces, and Vice President Ky agreed. He recalled that the first battalion of paratroopers which had been trained by the French in their colonial army had been composed mainly of Cambodians. He added that the Cambodian spirit was actually better than that of the Vietnamese forces. The President spoke of the extra difficulties which the North Vietnamese would encounter in Cambodia, where they would not enjoy the support of the people. Vice President Ky fully concurred.

The President asked about the timing of a possible enemy offensive—would it be soon, now that the rains had stopped? Ambassador Sullivan surmised that one would not probably be expected in the near future. Although the rains had stopped, the flood waters of the Mekong had yet to recede and the flow of the Tonle Sap also reversed about this time of the year. Some time would be required for the countryside to dry out. Ambassador Sullivan speculated that an attack might not come before January or perhaps around Tet. In the meantime, the enemy would try to bring down the needed supplies. The President declared that if this were the case, it might be necessary for the U.S. to hit North Vietnamese supply dumps again. Vice President Ky noted that if a North Vietnamese attack did occur, the terrain in the southern part of Cambodia favored the use of gunships. He explained that by this he did not mean only AC-47s, but AC-119s and helicopters.

The President asked Vice President Ky for his thoughts on the future of the Paris talks. Vice President Ky responded by saying that he had talked to Ambassador Bruce and Ambassador Habib in Paris and

considered this matter himself very carefully. He was of the opinion that the Communists would not enter into real negotiations at this time. For example, they could not accept a cease-fire for the reason that most of their forces were now not in Vietnam but in Cambodia, and a cease-fire would leave them at a real disadvantage. The President recalled that when in earlier years the U.S. had been in a weak position with respect to the North Vietnamese, people had argued that Hanoi would not negotiate because it thought it could get what it wanted by force; on the other hand, now that we were in a strong position, the same people argued that Hanoi would not negotiate from a position of weakness. In fact, Hanoi was playing a game—it had obtained a bombing halt from us in return for entering into talks, but had no intention of reaching a political settlement. While we wanted negotiations, it wanted South Vietnam, and looked on the talks as a screen behind which it could carry on the war without being bombed. (Dr. Kissinger remarked that from Hanoi's position this was a logical approach.) Accordingly, we needed to accept the fact that the value of the Paris talks was mainly in the public relations sense. We wanted peace and would continue to work for a genuine political settlement, but should not expect that Hanoi would cooperate.

The President asked Vice President Ky if he had been in contact with any representatives of the other side while in Paris. Ky acknowledged that he had held one meeting with a representative of the NLF, whom he did not name.³ He indicated that he had not followed this meeting up despite a request from the NLF for another session.

The President asked Vice President Ky for a run-down on the political and economic situation in South Vietnam as the Vice President saw it. Vice President Ky began by noting that he had engaged in long discussions with President Thieu on political and economic conditions before proceeding to Paris. On the economic side, he had told President Thieu that there was too much corruption in the country and too much of an imbalance between the small number of people in the very high income brackets and the very many people in the lower income brackets. The country was living beyond its means, and the economy was distorted due to inflation and the pressure of the war. What was needed was a "revolutionary" program of social reform to equalize incomes as much as possible and to end imbalances, and he had recommended this to President Thieu. He did not elaborate on his recommendation, and noted that Thieu had been rather cautious. Continuing, Vice President Ky said that speaking very frankly he saw the need for

³ Helms sent a report to Kissinger under a November 20 covering memorandum of a meeting between Ky and "an official of a pro-Communist Vietnamese front group in Paris." (Ibid., Box 190, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, 1 Oct 70–Dec 70)

greater U.S.-GVN cooperation in the economic field. What we were doing now was too superficial. The economic reforms which had gone into effect a month or so ago would not, in his opinion, have a very lasting value. This related to what he had mentioned earlier concerning the need to improve the living standards of the ARVN. If one calculated that there were over a million ARVN soldiers and 3 million ARVN dependents, plus another 250,000 civil servants and a million dependents, some idea of the magnitude of the problem could be arrived at. Vice President Ky hoped for more detailed U.S.-GVN discussions in planning for U.S. assistance. The President remarked that the economic field usually turned out to be a tougher problem for developing nations than the immediate military struggle.

Turning to the political scene, Vice President Ky observed that there was insufficient political unity in South Vietnam. Some elements which were anti-GVN were also anti-Communist, but there were others which in their anti-GVN stance might be used by the Communists. Vice President Ky mentioned that he had also discussed the problem of unity with President Thieu, and had urged Thieu to try to bring political leaders such as General Big Minh and Tran Van Don closer to the Government. When asked by the President if Big Minh, for example, might be willing to get closer to the Government, Vice President Ky replied that he had been away from Saigon for nearly two months and didn't know the situation now, but he had felt at the time of his departure that Big Minh would be willing to move closer to President Thieu.

Vice President Ky raised the question of a political settlement, which had been another of the subjects which he had discussed with President Thieu. He had proposed to Thieu that the GVN offer country-wide elections in South Vietnam for a Constituent Assembly, in which all political elements could participate including the Communists. This Constituent Assembly would then draft a new constitution under which elections for the President, Vice President, and the Upper and Lower Houses would be held. Meanwhile the present Government would continue to function as a caretaker. By making this offer, Thieu would be able to deal with the Communists' rejection of the present constitution on the grounds that they had been given no opportunity to participate in its drafting. Moreover, the offer would make the South Vietnamese people believe that Thieu was sincere. At present there was some feeling that the Government was not sincere, since it was contradictory on what it said about participation in the political process in South Vietnam. While on the one hand the Government took the position that all political factions were able to take part, it also held that the Communists were excluded. There would also be a favorable reaction among world and U.S. opinion. Vice President Ky said he had been advised

by Thieu to pass on the details of this proposal to the President for his reaction.⁴

The President expressed interest, but noted that the initiative on a political settlement should be worked out among the South Vietnamese themselves. He assumed that it would be done carefully, and explained the American system for making sure that an executive position has thorough agreement of all concerned. He said that a forthcoming proposal from the South Vietnamese would be useful, not only in South Vietnam but also internationally, and particularly with the American public. He believed that such a proposal should be (1) precise, (2) reasonable, and (3) that the South Vietnamese would have no illusions that the Communists would accept it.⁵

The President mentioned that the South Vietnamese Presidential elections were coming up in less than a year, and he wanted to address this matter with Vice President Ky as a man who understood politics very well. It was extremely important that political elements in South Vietnam comported themselves during this period in ways which would not discourage American support. Although the position of the Administration was to stand firmly beside the GVN, there was extremely heavy criticism of this policy in certain quarters in the U.S. Vice President Ky should know that we had tremendous problems domestically in maintaining our support for the GVN. We were not trying to take any stand on who in South Vietnam should run for President—the President assumed that Vice President Ky himself might be one of the candidates—and we were only concerned that enemies of Vietnam (by whom he meant U.S. critics who want us out of Vietnam altogether, not the North Vietnamese) would not be given anything

⁴ In a November 23 briefing memorandum to Nixon for this meeting, Kissinger noted that Ky would probably discuss his political proposals, which he believed were intended to do the following: make himself look acceptable to the Communists as a possible leader of a coalition government; win the Nixon administration's support for his candidacy in the 1971 elections; and make himself appear essential to Thieu if Thieu won in 1971. Kissinger recommended that Nixon "listen politely, but above all noncommittally," so as not to give Ky anything "he could exploit politically." (Ibid., Box 150, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 1 Nov 70)

⁵ According to a November 27 memorandum of a conversation among Ky, Kissinger, Bui Diem, and Holdridge, the participants engaged in a much more detailed discussion of Ky's political proposals, particularly his idea of an election for an assembly to draft a new constitution and allowing the Communists to participate. Kissinger was concerned that if it were held so close to the Presidential elections the electorate would be confused. Ky responded that the elections for the assembly would not be that important and that his plan would allow the GVN to say that it was "ready to revise the system." He also doubted that the Communists would participate. Kissinger asked him to delay any announcement of a proposal until early January, before any North Vietnamese dry-season offensive would likely begin. (Ibid.)

which would help them in their efforts to undermine the Administration's policy. What was needed was a continuing demonstration by the Vietnamese of political maturity and stability.

The President went on to recall the period in GVN history when there had been frequent coups d'état. Everytime such a coup had taken place, big headlines had appeared in the U.S. press which in effect had called on us to wash our hands of the "mess in Vietnam." The President stressed again the importance of not giving Senatorial critics an opportunity to block the Administration's efforts to help Vietnam. The problem was now not so much on the military side but on the economic, since we had to go to the Hill to get appropriations. This was where the real fight lay.

Vice President Ky stated that the question as he saw it was not so much one of "fair competition" among the Vietnamese political elements, but rather the existence of "too much fair competition" stemming from what in his opinion were deficiencies in the present constitution. This was why he had spoken to President Thieu of the need for more political unity. As far as he himself was concerned, his only desire was to promote such unity, and he did not care if he was President, Vice President, or something else. He could assure the President that there would be no coup d'état—coups were "obsolete" in Vietnam.

The President declared that we would stand firmly by South Vietnam. Our troop withdrawals would continue (although we would still keep logistical units in South Vietnam), but we would at the same time provide the South Vietnamese with the military and economic assistance which they needed to do the job for themselves. He was aware that Vice President Ky was in agreement on our troop withdrawal policy. He foresaw that, barring a political settlement in Paris, a time would come when the Communist threat in South Vietnam was reduced to attacks of terrorists which could be dealt with by the South Vietnamese Government. Meanwhile, he wanted Vice President Ky to know that on our side we were as concerned about South Vietnamese casualties as we were about our own. The fact that South Vietnamese casualties were on the order of three times our own was not regarded lightly by us. The President asked Vice President Ky to pass these remarks on to his comrades in the ranks.

77. Memorandum for the 40 Committee¹

Washington, November 27, 1970.

SUBJECT

Periodic Report on the Covert Psychological Warfare Operations Against North Vietnam and the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam

1. Summary

This is a status report on psychological warfare operations directed against the political, military and psychological arms of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and against the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF). Current CIA covert psychological activities consist primarily of black radio broadcasts to North Vietnam (NVN) and South Vietnam (SVN). The program also includes black letter mailing operations to NVN, black leaflets distributed in SVN, and fabricated enemy documents delivered by armed reconnaissance teams of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) to specific areas in SVN.

Current operations derive from the program of psychological warfare which CIA began conducting with ARVN in 1961. The Special Group (5412)² approved this original program on 8 June 1961. On 11 January 1964 higher authority approved OPLAN 34 A,³ which included combined Government of Vietnam (GVN)/DOD/CIA covert psychological warfare directed at targets in NVN. This program was modified in November 1968 to curtail those operations, including air support, which were being conducted north of the 17th Parallel. Certain psychological warfare activities were retained, and on 23 September 1969 the 40 Committee approved this modified program. This program has been coordinated in Saigon with Ambassador Bunker, the Mission Council and the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV). In Washington, this program has been approved by Ambassador Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and by Brigadier General Donald D. Blackburn, Special Assistant for

¹ Source: Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, 40 Committee Meetings. Secret; Eyes Only.

² The Special Group/5412 Committee was the predecessor to the 303 Committee and the 40 Committee.

³ In the early 1960s, the CIA, using non-American personnel, ran covert operations against North Vietnam. From January 1964, a United States military organization in South Vietnam—Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Studies and Observations Group, or MACVSOG—took over the program and, also using non-Americans, called it Oplan 34A. For the origins of Oplan 34A, see *Foreign Relations, 1964–1968*, volume I, Vietnam, 1964, Document 4.

Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (SACSA), Joint Chiefs of Staff.

All of the present operations are conducted with the support of the ARVN. With the exception of one CIA-controlled radio targeted at NVN youth, those operations which have NVN as their target are under MACV operational control, exercised by the Studies and Observations Group (SOG). The Agency, coordinating with MACVSOG, exercises similar operational control over those operations directed against targets in SVN.

This activity is budgeted for [*dollar amount not declassified*] in FY 71.⁴

[Omitted here is the body of the report.]

⁴ According to an October 22 memorandum for the record by Jessup, the 40 Committee approved the report during a meeting on March 10 at which Kissinger, Packard, Johnson, Knowles, Helms, Nelson, Kennedy, Meyer, and Coerr were present; however, because the Executive Secretary was absent, no minutes were prepared. (Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, 40 Committee Meetings)

78. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)¹

Washington, November 28, 1970, 12:20 p.m.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

P: Nothing particularly new in the international field today is there?

H: No, we're putting together those understanding papers today.²

P: Good.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 998, Haig Chronological Files, Haig Telcons 1970. No classification marking. All omissions and brackets except those that indicate unrelated material are in the original.

² Reference is to an interagency review of an understanding reached between the North Vietnamese and the United States in October 1968 that, among other things, established that unarmed U.S. reconnaissance flights over North Vietnam would not be considered "acts of force." The review was prompted by an attack by the North Vietnamese on an unarmed reconnaissance flight on November 13. See Document 79. For a fuller explanation of the understanding, see *Foreign Relations, 1964–1968*, volume VII, Vietnam, September 1968–January 1969, Document 167.

H: They will be quite conclusive.

P: Good. That will be a good one to have. We must never assume that people know what we know is the truth.

H: Well, I think there are some mischief-makers in there.

P: People trying to renege on what they said?

H: Yes.

P: But don't their own words nail them to the cross?

H: I think so.

P: I am convinced—I've been thinking about it—and I am convinced that our rescue operation was a plus. I am not concerned about people yakking around about the intelligence failing. What do you think?

H: It was absolutely a solid plus. I was at a dinner last night for Ky . . .³

P: Oh were you!

H: Yes, and from the military peoples' point of view it was a shot in the arm that they needed. To them it was a major breakthrough of national leadership with respect to the military.

P: Trying to win.

H: Yes, doing something they felt we needed.

P: Well, it's up to them. If they come up with another plan, we'll go through with it. We've got a lot of bright people in the military. We're not sending them to War Colleges just to learn the history of the [Napoleonic campaigns] are we?

H: No sir. Some of these men said last night that this was to them the same as the Doolittle raids on Tokyo.

P: Really?

H: Yes, sir, and I think it has the same effect on Hanoi. They are a little goosey.

P: It doesn't bother me to have people ask if we dropped bombs. We know we didn't, but let them be confused. I think our critics who jumped on us about this will have to draw back a little bit.

H: Yes, and I think the Cambodian thing⁴ has shaken our opponents who were wrong as hell. I think we've turned a corner on this war and how it's conducted. People have confidence.

³ Haig attended a dinner with South Vietnamese military officers at the South Vietnamese Embassy. (*The New York Times*, November 25, 1970, p. A6)

⁴ Reference is to the joint U.S.-GVN operation into Cambodia from April to June 1970.

P: Even though it failed. But that's one thing. As far as success, my idea of it is a little different from others, and I hope they teach this at the military schools. My philosophy is . . . they say it failed. I say the greatest failure is not trying. If you try and don't succeed, it's not a failure; it's just a lack of success in one instance. You keep trying.

H: Exactly.

P: These boys did a hell of a job.

H: Yes, and your backing them up and immediately recognizing them had a tremendous impact on the military.

P: It's worth doing then.

H: Absolutely. These were all old military hands, personal friends of Ky.

P: You didn't hear any crying about why wasn't the intelligence better?

H: I never heard anything about it. They were all very enthusiastic.

P: Ky probably mentioned—he said it to me—that he wishes they had participated. We know the reason they didn't is they would have leaked, but I think they ought to do it. I want an order put out to Abrams on their conducting a raid. I would be delighted to have our Colonel over there⁵ help and advise them. I would like to have one a month from now on. Go in and blow up a power plant or anything, one a month from now on, something once a month. They have killed South Vietnamese. Get that figure for me too. I have heard that in the last year they have killed _____ citizens. Get that figure on how many have been killed since the talks began.⁶ Let's give the South Vietnamese the go-ahead on that. We want continued harassing and cutting them off. CIA tried that Dien Bien Phu thing that fizzled.⁷ Let the South Vietnamese go in there. They have got to start fighting in the [North]—today is the day it begins, where South Vietnam begins fighting the North.

H: That's a meaningful incentive for them.

⁵ Apparently Colonel Arthur Simons, who commanded the ground element during the Son Tay raid.

⁶ Kissinger sent a memorandum to Nixon on November 30 in response to this request. He noted that the Department of Defense reported that there had been 15,507 assassinations of South Vietnamese civilians and 18,447 abductions between May 1968 and September 1970. Of this amount, 10,759 assassinations and 11,818 abductions had occurred since the "expanded talks" had begun in 1969. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 150, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 1 Nov 70)

⁷ The operation to attack Dien Bien Phu was approved by Nixon on July 18, 1969. See *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume VI, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Document 98.

P: I want our top brains and theirs working in the greatest secrecy to get some plans. If the South is ready to go North, let them go. Ky said there are a lot of people in the South who are Northerners and know the area very well. Let them go. Okay?

H: Yes sir.

79. Memorandum From President Nixon to Secretary of State Rogers, Secretary of Defense Laird, and Director of Central Intelligence Helms¹

Washington, November 30, 1970.

SUBJECT

Speculation Concerning our Position on Unarmed Reconnaissance over North Vietnam

There has been recent speculation concerning our position on unarmed reconnaissance over North Vietnam. The following is a brief summary of the facts as I understand them:

—On a number of occasions in discussions in Paris prior to cessation of the bombing,² it was emphasized that all acts of force, rather than acts of war, would be ceased. This distinction was made to provide for unarmed reconnaissance flights over North Vietnam following the bombing halt. In summarizing the understanding at a meeting of his advisors on October 29, 1968,³ President Johnson stated, “Both Hanoi and Moscow are clear that we shall continue reconnaissance of North Vietnam. That is why we agreed to stop only acts of force and not acts of war.”

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 106, Kissinger Office Files, Country Files, Far East, Vietnam, Reconnaissance Flights, Viet 1968 Understanding, 2 of 2. Secret; Nodis. Kissinger forwarded this memorandum to Nixon under an undated covering memorandum. In a November 22 memorandum to Kissinger, Nixon instructed both him and Laird to prepare a “no-nonsense reply to any doves” that criticized the U.S. strikes in response to DRV attacks on the flights. Nixon directed that the reply be sent to Senators Dole, Griffin, Stennis, and Scott, and Congressmen Ford and Arends (Ibid., White House Special Files, Box 2, President’s Personal Files, Memorandum from the President, November 1970)

² President Johnson halted the bombing on October 31, 1968.

³ See *Foreign Relations*, 1964–1968, volume VII, Vietnam, September 1968–January 1969, Document 140.

—On November 11, 1968, shortly after cessation of the bombing, we protested North Vietnamese firing on our reconnaissance planes and told them that we did not consider reconnaissance flights as constituting the use of force. This made our interpretation of the agreement clear to the North Vietnamese.

—On January 9, 1969, Messrs. Harriman and Vance expressed gratification to Soviet representatives Zorin and Oberemko that the DRV had not fired on our reconnaissance aircraft for twelve days. At this time, neither Zorin nor Oberemko challenged the continuation of the reconnaissance flights.

—Since the cessation we have consistently asserted the right to conduct unarmed reconnaissance.

In the future, there should be no question raised within the Government as to our position on continuing reconnaissance and North Vietnam's acquiescence to it. Queries should be answered along the lines that at the time of cessation of bombing in North Vietnam in November 1968, the U.S. Government made it clear in public statements and in private talks with the North Vietnamese and the Soviets that our reconnaissance flights over North Vietnam would continue. There is no question but that both the North Vietnamese and the Soviets clearly understand our position on these flights. The spokesmen of all Departments and Agencies will adhere to the foregoing guidance.⁴

Richard Nixon

⁴ In a November 30 memorandum to Kissinger, Laird wrote that there were "potentially damaging divergencies within the Executive Branch" on whether the United States made clear in 1968 that reconnaissance flights were not covered by the bombing halt. He believed, however, that the record clearly showed that both the DRV and the Soviet Union understood that such flights were excluded. Furthermore, Nixon said so during a television interview on July 1. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 106, Kissinger Office Files, Country Files, Far East, Vietnam, Reconnaissance Flights, Viet 1968 Understanding, 2 of 2) The text of the interview is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pp. 543–559.

80. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, December 1, 1970.

SUBJECT

Operations in North Vietnam

The attached memorandum from Dick Helms (Tab A)² notes that since March 1970, when you directed that CIA undertake shallow penetration raids against North Vietnamese targets within 30 kilometers of the border, fourteen such operations have been mounted, nine of which were successful.

In his memorandum Mr. Helms cites three considerations which he believes now warrant a review of, and change in, planning for the immediate future.

a. There are relatively few targets within the 30 kilometer border area and since the North Vietnamese have come to realize that such operations are being conducted and to understand their general pattern, surprise is no longer really possible. Therefore, the whole border area is now "hot" and extremely hostile.

b. In a sense, the North Vietnam raids are competitive with CIA's interdiction forays in South Laos since the same case officers, trained indigenous personnel and helilift support facilities are utilized. With the dry season beginning and evidences appearing of a major North Vietnamese logistics and personnel infiltration effort down the Ho chi Minh Trail, a concentration of CIA's limited personnel and resources on South Laos interdiction targets would now produce considerably greater return than a continued diversion of a significant portion of these assets to small raids in North Vietnam border areas.

c. Based on its experience in shallow penetration operations, CIA is studying possibilities for much deeper North Vietnam penetrations

¹ Source: National Security Council, Nixon Intelligence Files, Subject Files, Vietnam, Apr 1970–24 Dec 1970. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for action. Attached but not printed is a memorandum from Haig to Chapin, November 27, asking him to revise an earlier draft to include a requirement that CIA develop plans for deeper operations, even though the Defense Department was responsible for operations beyond 30 kilometers. On November 30, Chapin wrote on the memorandum that CIA "accepts this as an entirely reasonable request."

² Attached but not printed at Tab A is a memorandum from Helms to Kissinger, November 19.

using helicopters for transportation of raiding teams which now must cross the border on foot. If the problems are soluble this would bring within reach considerably more lucrative targets than those in the immediate border areas.

In light of the foregoing considerations, Mr. Helms recommends, and I concur, that the CIA shallow penetration program be suspended for ninety days. In addition, I recommend that the ninety-day suspension of this program be coupled with a firm requirement that during this period CIA develop specific plans for deeper penetration operations into North Vietnam.

Approval of these recommendations will enable the Agency to concentrate its limited assets in South Laos with greater benefits to the overall U.S. effort, as well as work on the development of potentially more rewarding penetration operations deep within North Vietnam.

Recommendation:

That you approve a ninety-day suspension of CIA's current program of conducting shallow penetration raids in the North Vietnam border areas on the condition that CIA will utilize this period to develop specific plans for deeper penetration operations against more lucrative targets in North Vietnam.³

³ The President initialed his approval.

81. Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, December 2, 1970, 11:11 a.m.–12:07 p.m.

SUBJECT

Indochina Contingency Planning

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

Mr. U. Alexis Johnson

Mr. Marshall Green

Defense

Mr. David Packard

Mr. Dennis Doolin

Mr. George Fowler

CIA

Mr. Richard Helms

Mr. William Wells

JCS

Lt. Gen. John W. Vogt

Capt. Charles Long

NSC Staff

Mr. John Holdridge

Col. Richard T. Kennedy

Mr. W. Richard Smyser

Mr. D. Keith Guthrie

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of CIA and JCS briefings and the Defense Department contingency study,² the WSAG reviewed recent military developments in Indochina and discussed assessments of enemy intentions and friendly capabilities. It was agreed that these assessments would again be examined at the WSAG meeting scheduled for December 11, and that in the meantime a special effort would be made to identify possible weaknesses which might be exploited by the enemy during the coming dry season. It was also agreed that the plans being prepared by the Defense Department for dealing with military contingencies in Indochina during the coming months would be reviewed at the December 11 WSAG meeting.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Top Secret. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House.

² The Department of Defense study entitled, "Indochina Contingencies, Dry Season, 1970–1971," dated November 30. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 1–1 ASIA SE)

82. Telegram From the Department of State and Department of Defense to the Embassy in South Vietnam¹

Washington, December 7, 1970, 8:31 p.m.

199387. Subject: Prisoner of War Initiative. Refs: A. State 198683,² B. Saigon 19270.³

1. This supersedes guidance contained Ref A.

2. In order further to underline our desire for earliest possible release of PWs in all of Indochina, the President would like to make a joint US/GVN proposal which would consist of following elements:

A. Recall the PW proposal in the President's October 7 speech, approved by the Governments of South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, for "the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of war held by both sides."

B. Underline that this humanitarian issue need not—and should not—await resolution of other military and political issues.

C. Point to last week's United Nations resolution on this subject which reflected global concern.⁴

D. State that the holiday season is a particularly apt occasion for movement on this humanitarian issue.

E. Make a specific offer of the immediate release of the 8,200 NVA PWs held in SVN in exchange for the immediate release of all US and

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 190, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, 1 Oct 70–Dec 70. Secret; Nodis; Paris Meetings. Drafted by Frank Sieverts (U/PW) and R. Jefferson (DOD/ISA); cleared by Green, Laird, Brigadier General Smith (Joint Staff (J3)), and Kissinger; and approved by Johnson. Repeated for information to the Delegation in Paris.

² In telegram 198683 to Saigon, December 6, the Department reported the President wanted the U.S. and GVN delegations in Paris to make a joint offer at the December 10 plenary meeting to release all DRV prisoners held in the South in exchange for all GVN and allied prisoners in the North. Additionally, if either delegation was asked why allied prisoners held in the South were not included, it should offer to include them in exchange for all VC in the South. The Department also instructed Bunker to discuss the proposal with Thieu and noted that the Department of Defense wanted to have all U.S. prisoners throughout Indochina included. (Ibid., Box 94, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam—US POWs in NVN, Vol. I) Laird made this POW proposal to Nixon in a November 18 memorandum; however, according to an attached NSC correspondence profile, Kissinger saw it but it was never forwarded to Nixon. (Ibid.)

³ In telegram 19270 from Saigon, December 7, Bunker reported on his meeting with Thieu who was not prepared to release all 25,000 VC imprisoned in the South for fear that they would rejoin the VCI. Thieu also believed that including prisoners throughout Indochina would complicate the proposal. (Ibid.)

⁴ A U.S.-sponsored resolution aimed at protecting U.S. prisoners of war in Vietnam was approved in the UNGA Social Committee on December 1.

free world personnel held in Indochina and all GVN personnel held outside South Vietnam.⁵

F. Say that Ambassadors Bruce and Lam are ready to meet daily with the other side's negotiators to make immediate progress on this question, starting December 11.

3. This formulation, while reaffirming the October 7 proposal, deals only with prisoners being held in countries other than their country of origin. Our line would be that the October 7 proposal still stands, and that we have only broken out a part of it to generate movement.

4. For maximum impact we would hope this offer could be made jointly by US and GVN spokesmen in Paris at the Dec. 10 session.

5. Please raise this with President Thieu with a view to getting his approval for the proposal to be made jointly at the Dec. 10 plenary. You should explain to Thieu that we greatly appreciate his cooperation, as well as the considerations raised by him reported Ref. B. However, judgment here is that omission from proposal of US PWs held elsewhere than NVN would be politically unacceptable in US, and would undermine our consistent position that NVN, as moving force in aggression against GVN and other nations in Southeast Asia, is accountable for all US missing and captured personnel regardless of location of loss.⁶

Rogers

⁵ In a December 7 memorandum to Kissinger, Haig wrote that Laird wanted to change the original version of this paragraph, which called for an exchange of prisoners held in North and South Vietnam, to the text here. Laird's concern was that the original version would upset the relatives of those POWs being held outside Vietnam. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 336, Subject Files, Items to Discuss with the President, 8 September 70–December 70)

⁶ The two delegations made the offer at the December 10 plenary, and the DRV and NLF responded by offering an immediate cease-fire if the United States would remove all its forces from the South by June 30. (*The New York Times*, December 11, 1970, p. 5) Nixon followed up by issuing an "Open Letter" to the families of U.S. POWs on December 26, in which he recounted the administration's efforts to secure the POWs' release and DRV intransigence. He noted that the December 10 offer was still good and that the South would release a group of sick and wounded prisoners as it had each year as a demonstration of "our readiness to comply with international standards." (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pp. 1157–1160)

83. **Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and His Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)**¹

Washington, December 9, 1970, 12:20 p.m.

[Omitted here is unrelated discussion.]

[Kissinger]: In Cambodia the communists have started an attack and have beaten up in Cambodia. Perhaps we should have an airlift of the area. It's best to start our offensive or we will be in a rescue operation.

P: In the paper there was something about Cambodians doing well.

K: I don't know what it referred to. It was put out in Phnom Penh.

P: We know what our facts are. No question of going forward if we can get them to do it.

K: I have talked to Laird and Moorer.

P: That is it? They are with us? How about Abrams?

K: I think so. We are getting additional intelligence.

P: Where would it go?

K: The rubber plantation in the general area of the Fish Hook where we were last year.

P: Are there North Vietnamese there?

K: It's the tip of their offensive. The good one is the one Haig will look into and they are making the plans on.

P: We have to do both. This is the tip of the communist offensive?

K: It's the tip where they go from the jungles to the plains. If we could set them back a bit but it's mostly a despoiling operation. Should be able to do some within the week.

P: In the meantime it's _____ a psychological turn around.

K: I had a fascinating cable from Ladd² about the press which confirms what you said. He thinks they are physiologically and psychologically sick. They don't lie but select the facts in such a way that makes it sound that the leaders have a vested interest in defeat. He briefs them regularly and thinks it's hopeless. He makes (or lacks) analysis. Show a strong operation and not putting much in there. On such limits we are _____. These are in response to the clippings last week.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 8, Chronological File. No classification marking. All omissions except those of unrelated material are in the original.

² Not further identified.

P: Is Swank doing better than the other guy?

K: That talk you had with him in San Clemente was very helpful.³ And it's helped turn the State Dept. around because Marshall Green won't go against his own Ambassador. They had the vote on Guinea and we abstained.

P: I saw that.

K: That's not major.

P: With regard to the Cambodian thing, any question about Moorer knowing about the urgency I put on this problem?

K: Absolutely not and I will call him again immediately.⁴

P: Any air needed, put it in there. On the infiltration, maybe you have to bang earlier.

K: If the airlift is undertaken we may be [asked?] to fly the planes for it.

P: No. That should be avoided. See what they can do on their own for a change. That will open a whole can of worms.

K: I favor the ground offensive over the airlift because we don't want SVN unit trapped up there.

P: Make sure they are going at break neck speed. Hit them before they hit us.

K: Mel is aboard.

P: How about another strike at the choke points? It's not fiddle-dee-dee as before.

K: We should wait on the choke points until after we have Laos completed because it's most effective with that. The difficulty is that the grounds are wet so they must dry out a little before we can start the ground offensive so they can only trap a group here and there.

P: They could _____

K: 100 people. Lack of ability and leadership but they fight well. NVN casualties are substantial.

P: South Vietnamese too. How about having Ladd back over here and have a talk with him? Have him come back with Haig. He needs time off, he's (been working very hard).

K: You never met him.

³ See Document 32.

⁴ Kissinger called Moorer at 3:30 p.m. and informed him: "The President is raising Cain with me. He wants you to know that he has no intention of losing Cambodia." Kissinger expressed concern about putting any U.S. forces on the ground in Cambodia. Moorer replied that he had a plan that would not involve U.S. troops on the ground and the two agreed to meet later that afternoon. (Transcript of telephone conversation, December 9; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 8, Chronological File)

P: Never at all and I should talk with him. We are not going to lose this at this point. I don't want Americans on the ground in the north (?) but we will do anything else. Bombing, whatever. They finally got under Bill's skin yesterday.⁵ They crack him too hard, he hits back.

K: He is very tough. Much more than Mel. The dinner last night had a nice human touch.

P: Means more to him than a division. That we care about him.

K: The story you told at the end was very touching.

P: They should get that out sometime.

K: I did the taping for the "Today" show yesterday and said a lot of what you do. The questions were very sympathetic. They will run it several mornings two weeks from now. Questions on how you work, etc.

P: They like that. They are more interested in the man. On Cambodia thing, it was good that Bill slapped back and said we are not telling you the plans. It's about time someone said it. We constantly get this on our credibility gap. What do you hear?

K: I don't think it's a problem. The people opposed to you are opposed because they understand your program but they are opposed. Who today can remember what exactly _____ the Hanoi led. Laird has a tendency to be clever but those are marginal problems. There is no credibility problem except among people opposed to us anyway.

P: Fulbright was a great laugh because he said he had reason to know that the Administration knew before the raid there were no prisoners there.

K: That's plain sick.

P: Why risk 60 men.

K: We could have done more damage with 4 bombs than with the whole raid.

P: The other way he put it was that we knew that the enemy knew. If they had known, there would be 60 more dead Americans.

K: It's absurd!

P: It's typical of the credibility gap thing. So let's keep the WH staff informed. They get badgered by the press more. We have to constantly do it. On Cambodia I get back to the fact for to win it. Do they both understand?

⁵ Nixon is referring to Rogers' testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the administration's request for a supplement to the Foreign Aid bill. Laird testified as well. For a description of the hearing, see *The New York Times*, December 9, 1970, p. 18.

K: Yes. I talked with them after dinner last night. They are doing a first draft and I will talk to them.

P: South Vietnam will bomb in there. Tactical air and knock the hell out of them. Combined with major strike. _____ is a pretty big month. It can only mean that they need them.

K: They cannot replace the losses we consumed. If they keep up at this level they are pointing towards a major offensive. They are probably planning a wallop against Cambodia but not South Vietnam—They can't do enough damage.

P: We are doing nothing?

K: That's what we are sending Haig out there for. So Abrams will know that you want him to launch spoiling operations.

P: Get a message to Abrams from me on this point.⁶ Not from you or Laird or Moorer but from me.

K: This minute.

P: It's of urgent importance and I have asked Haig to discuss it and it should be done now. I don't need to see it. Good-by, Henry.

⁶ Later that day, Nixon approved a message for transmission to Abrams in which the President noted that the situation in Cambodia during the dry season could deteriorate seriously, allowing the enemy to re-occupy areas near the South Vietnamese border through a "strategy designed to neutralize or topple Cambodian resistance." He wrote that there were "sufficient assets to permit the adoption of bold and aggressive allied counteractions," and ordered Abrams to work with the FANK and ARVN to begin planning "within the political limitations imposed on U.S. Forces." Nixon added that he was sending Haig to the region to "amplify for you and other responsible U.S. officials my personal thinking" on the operations. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 3, Chronological File 12/70)

84. Diary Entry by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)¹

Washington, December 9, 1970.

1630

Met with Kissinger in his White House Office. I pointed out to Kissinger that we are asking Abrams to do the impossible. We have just a handful of advisers operating out of the Embassy at Phnom Penh and all our reports are at least 24–36 hours late. There is virtually no way of evaluating the situation in Cambodia or of evaluating Cambodian plans for coping with the situation. There are some 25,000 FANK troops around Kompong Cham stymied by only 2800 VC/NVA. Yet, we are asking Abrams to operate at long distances, by remote control, with no representatives in-country and no legal authority over the troops involved. Told Kissinger that we have somehow gotten President Thieu all wound up and ready to go. But if we keep pricking his balloon he is going to give up.

However, Kissinger is concerned over losing the Cambodian MAP Supplemental. He doesn't want to do anything until the vote has been taken on the Floor. He wants to investigate other ways and means of shoring up the situation in Cambodia without using US personnel on the ground. He asked that we go out to Abrams and query him as to what we can do using Vietnamese airlift only.

Then Kissinger asked why he wasn't informed of the situation in Kompong Cham. I told him that we have been getting daily reports on the situation since the Chen La operation started on 8 September.²

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Moorer Diary, July 1970–July 1974. Top Secret.

² The next diary entry summarizes a meeting between Moorer and Laird at 6:25 p.m. on December 9 in Laird's office at the Pentagon. Laird questioned why the contingency planning was for U.S. airlift of ARVN troops in Cambodia instead of U.S. tactical air support. Laird had reservations, which he had expressed to the President, about U.S. airlift and wanted to use ARVN airlift. Moorer responded that if that was the case, the United States should rethink its MAP to South Vietnam and provide ARVN with "lots of airlift aircraft." (Ibid.)

85. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, December 9, 1970.

SUBJECT

The Military Situation in Cambodia

Attached at Tab A² is a DIA appraisal of the current military situation in Cambodia. Its major points are:

—Cambodian forces are having little success in their operations northeast of Phnom Penh.

—The multi-battalion Cambodian force which began attempts to reopen Route 6 to Kompong Thom on September 7, 1970, remains stalled and seems unlikely to press on to its original objective, Kompong Thom.

—On December 5, three government battalions were routed by the Communists in the most serious setback yet.

—Recent Communist moves have isolated the town of Kompong Cham on Route 7.

The outlook is that without outside assistance, Cambodian forces along Route 6 appear to have little prospect for success in their mission. Moreover, the enemy threat to that force has increased and there is a danger that the column will be subject to piecemeal attack.

—It is likewise doubtful that Cambodian forces by themselves can reopen Route 7 so long as enemy forces remain in the area.

Enemy forces west of Kompong Cham total about 3,800 men compared to Cambodian forces of some 27,000–28,000 men. East of Kompong Cham, the Communists have some 11,400 men whereas the Cambodian Government has only one 400-man commando battalion.

I have spoken to Admiral Moorer about this situation and expressed my concern that after repeated efforts we have been unable to get accurate intelligence until the situation has deteriorated.³ He states that one of the factors which have enabled the enemy to build up in

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 511, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. XI. Top Secret; Contains Codeword. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² Attached but not printed at Tab A is DIA Appraisal DIAAPPR 47A-70, December 9, entitled, "Cambodian Situation in Vicinity of Routes 6 and 7."

³ See Document 84.

recent weeks is the very poor weather conditions which have limited effective air operations.⁴

⁴ Nixon wrote the following at the bottom of the memorandum: "K—I want an all out increase in bombing attacks in Cambodia—regardless of the budgetary limitations." Kissinger informed Nixon in a December 11 memorandum that the U.S. 7th Air Force had been directed to intensify its effort "with all available means," that tactical sortie levels had been increased in the past 10 days, and that the military was trying to increase its intelligence so that it could find better B-52 targets. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 587, Cambodia Operations, Air Support in Cambodia) In a December 12 memorandum to Kissinger, Rear Admiral Robinson confirmed that the order had gone through and that Abrams was insuring improved tactical air support. (Ibid.)

86. Diary Entry by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)¹

Washington, December 10, 1970.

1200

Met with Dr. Kissinger in the Situation Room at the White House. Also present were LTG Vogt, RADM Robinson and BG Haig. HAK opened the discussions by stating that the President had given further consideration to the Kompong Cham relief operation since HAK's talk with me last night.² The President now is inclined to go ahead with the operation, provided we can insure minimum US involvement. The President envisions that US airlift might handle logistics supplies while RVNAF carries the bulk of the troops. HAK thought this would be a good approach, and would minimize Congressional opposition which could jeopardize bigger operations in the future. He added that we should take bold and unexpected actions against the NVN in order to keep them off-balance. HAK said that he had already talked to SecDef about the airlift matter, and that SecDef wanted some answers to questions he had sent out to Abrams last night before committing himself. I stated that I presumed the questions to which he referred were those that I sent to Abrams. HAK continued with his assessment of the White House position, adding that the President would not be unduly concerned if some ARVN troops were on board the US aircraft; however,

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Moorer Diary, July 1970–July 1974. Top Secret.

² Presumably the discussion described in Document 84.

the cover must emphasize that we simply are participating in a movement of cargo. The President wants to be able to say that he authorized the lift of supplies—and if some troops accompanied—that would be a secondary matter. In response to HAK's question, I stated that the relief operation was of military value, and outlined briefly the objectives which we would seek.

HAK then asked if we are conducting a massive bombing campaign in Cambodia, implying such to be the desire. I replied that we are giving the Cambodians what they ask for, and this in turn was a function of how many validated targets could be found. HAK stated that the President would not accept that as an answer—that the President last night had specifically directed a major air effort in Cambodia. LTG Vogt pointed out that all *legitimate* requests are filled, and I added that when the ARVN move into Kompong Cham we will get better targets. HAK asked if we had directed Abrams to lay on a maximum air effort in response to the President's personal directive. I told him that we had not done so, but that I had just received a memorandum from SecDef which asked a number of questions pertaining to the feasibility of such an effort. HAK responded sharply to this approach, offering to provide "the tape" of the President's order if there is any doubt as to what was intended. He added that he had to be in a position to tell the President that we had carried out his directive, and requested a written report that we have done so by tomorrow morning. I stated that we would send a message to Abrams without delay.

I then asked HAK for clarification on the use of US airlift in normal resupply operations. I informed him that CINCPAC and the Ambassador had worked out an arrangement whereby US airlift would be used for logistics support whenever the RVNAF system becomes saturated. HAK emphatically supported such a plan, but requested that we not ask him to confirm existing authorities or procedures. He would have enough problems in handling the relief operation alone, without reopening the routine matter of normal logistics support which was proceeding satisfactorily, and without criticism.

I concluded with my assurance that we would send two messages—one pertaining to the use of maximum air, and one requesting an assessment of reconfiguring the Kompong Cham operation using US airlift for the bulk of supplies and RVNAF for the *bulk of troops*.³ HAK stated that he would then attempt to get a consensus among the senior people that we should go ahead with the operation. Looking further into the future, he thought that the bigger operations, such as that into the Chup Plantation, should kick off as fast as possible.

³ Neither further identified.

87. Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, December 11, 1970, 10:39 a.m.–noon.

SUBJECT

Indochina Contingency Planning

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	Defense
State	Mr. David Packard
Mr. Marshall Green	Mr. G. Warren Nutter
Mr. James Wilson	Mr. Dennis Doolin
CIA	Vice Adm. William Flanagan
Mr. Richard Helms	NSC Staff
Mr. William Nelson	General Alexander M. Haig
JCS	Mr. John H. Holdridge
Gen. Wm. C. Westmoreland	Col. Richard T. Kennedy
Lt. Gen. John W. Vogt	Mr. D. Keith Guthrie

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. The WSAG received a briefing on the contingency plans, prepared in response to Dr. Kissinger's memoranda of November 4 and 28, for actions to meet the developing military situation in Cambodia and for military operations throughout Indochina to meet possible enemy offensives during the coming dry season.²

2. With regard to the four plans related to the Cambodian situation, the WSAG noted that the Chup Plantation and Kampol-Takeo operations seemed most relevant to the current military situation. The Chup Plantation operation might also be useful in preventing a slow build-up of enemy forces preparatory to a major offensive later in the dry season. Implementation of the Kampol-Takeo operation would necessarily be related to the conduct of the U Minh Forest offensive al-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Top Secret; Nodis. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House.

² Regarding the contingency plans in response to Kissinger's memorandum of November 4 (Document 65), see footnote 2, Document 81. The contingency plans prepared in response to Kissinger's memorandum of November 28 envisioned operations against one or a combination of four contingency target areas: the Chup rubber plantation (north-east of Phnom Penh near Kompong Cham), Phnom Penh, Kompong Son Port area, and Kampol-Takeo (rice-producing areas south of Phnom Penh). (Memorandum from Laird to the President, December 9, attached to a memorandum from Kennedy and Holdridge to Kissinger, December 10; National Archives, Nixon Presidential materials, NSC Files, Box 511, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. XI, 11/1/70–1/71)

ready underway in South Vietnam. The WSAG agreed that there did not now seem to be any requirement to implement the remaining two plans, covering operations along Route 1 and to secure Kompong Som, and that successful implementation of the Chup Plantation operation would obviate the need for an attack along Route 1.

3. With respect to plans for operations throughout Indochina during the coming dry season, the WSAG noted the importance of accurately assessing the probability of simultaneous enemy attacks in Cambodia and in MRs 1 and 2 in Vietnam and of determining whether friendly forces had the capability to deal with such an eventuality. The WSAG also noted linkages between a Chup Plantation operation and possible enemy action in MRs 1 and 2; thus, it might be advantageous to launch the Chup operation at an early date while American forces would still be available to cope with an enemy attack in MRs 1 and 2.

4. The WSAG noted that possible large-scale operations in South Laos would have to be conducted in the context of a balance of forces heavily favorable to the enemy. CIA is to provide estimates on the total number of enemy troops in Laos and of their distribution between North and South.

5. The WSAG agreed that two of the key factors in the implementation of contingency operations in Indochina were (1) Thai military capabilities and willingness to participate and (2) Souvanna's attitude toward stepped-up operations by friendly forces in South Laos. In this connection, the importance of advance coordination with the Thais was noted, and it was agreed that Ambassador Unger's views on Thai participation in the various contingency operations should be obtained.

6. The WSAG noted that progress on the road being constructed by the Chinese in North Laos made it necessary to present the President with options for dealing with the problem. The options paper previously prepared is to be reviewed at the next WSAG meeting.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

88. **Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹**

Washington, December 12, 1970, 3 p.m.

P: Did you get a good bill of health.

K: Yes. They have to check the lab tests.

P: You think you will live. On this Cambodia thing I noted in the news summaries that they are very pessimistic with Cronkite reporting they have just three weeks to survive.

K: That is completely ridiculous. Unless our intelligence is all wrong. Have one unit in that area. Same troop as in Kompong Cham area. We have solved the problem that concerned you the other day. We are getting South Vietnamese airlift to get the troops in—the South Vietnamese that is. According to your orders the supplies are going in with American planes.²

P: They can do that. Supplies is fine. They are there to unload the supplies if they are needed too.

K: That's Vietnamese troops.

P: I understand.

K: That thing is going to start tomorrow night. That will relieve pressure on that village that was in the news. Then in 2 weeks to 6 weeks from now when the rainy season is over and the roads dry up . . .

P: Did the bombing strikes do any good?

K: We tripled and quadrupled . . . The only thing is we only have Cambodian ground observers and we can't really tell. But it did help morale. That thing I talked to you about yesterday is starting on Thursday.³ 25,000 SVN, _____, 10,000 Cambodians . . . Then in three weeks going to do the other thing. That will deal with the tip of it. We will have to wait until Haig comes back to see if we want to go ahead with the other things.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 8, Chronological File. No classification marking. A note at the top indicates that the transcriber paraphrased the conversation. All omissions are in the original.

² In a December 11 telephone conversation, Moorer informed Kissinger that Laird had approved a Cambodian operation using only ARVN personnel, but it would take a few days to implement. He noted that he was organizing the operation by telephone. Kissinger indicated his approval and asked, "Now will you bomb around Kampong Cham because the President is driving me out of my mind?" Moorer responded that the military had tripled the sorties in the area. (Transcript of telephone conversation, December 11; *ibid.*)

³ December 17.

P: Do we have a plan of bombing of choke points in the North yet?

K: My recommendation is to wait until we get all plans together (mention made of alternatives) and tie it up with whatever else we want to do, otherwise we will be piddling around over there and everyone will be raising hell with every little thing. We have to wait until the roads dry out. The rainy season lasted a month longer than we thought it would. That is why the week of Jan. 1st was chosen.

[Omitted here is unrelated discussion.]

P: Isn't it something that two major networks broadcast and believe this bullshit about Cambodia?

K: I have looked at the situation—unless our intelligence is so bad that we are totally misled. Intelligence says there are only 3,000 North Vietnamese in there. . . . Today for example we have solved the oil problem. I just talked with Adm. Moorer and they are sending it up the Mekong. When a road is cut it takes them a long time to get to the cut place but then they open it up. They only open up as far as they need to travel. Road between Sihanoukville and Phnom Penh is cut now and we have moved in some South Vietnamese troops because they are more quick on their feet . . . 1100 North Vietnamese in that whole general area. Now they have just small forces in there. Several weeks from now when some of their forces start moving in (after rainy season) we will have a problem with massive troops.

P: We do have a preemptive move planned don't we?

K: We have several. One starting early in January. It cannot begin now because roads are water logged. Right now we are fine but it is the dry season that we have to worry about.

P: Fine. It is interesting to note that some senators are squealing about . . . gave Laird a tough time about bombing. Mansfield was restrained. They are in the wrong wicket. Not everyone feels this way.

K: I was at the French Embassy last night at a party. Nancy Dickerson is no heavy weight but she said to Mike Mansfield who was sitting beside her that she could not see how to argue with the rationale that as long as we are pulling out there is no reason why we should not maintain enough force while we are doing it. That is the reaction I get from many people.

P: It will be if it continues too long. The press gave hardly any play to our low casualties—being down to 27. It was a good thing that I got it in the press conference. We reached about 40,000,000 with the press conference.⁴

⁴ Nixon is referring to his December 10 news conference. The text is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pp. 1101–1111.

K: It was a spectacular success. Apparently Novak said . . . one news summary said that you seemed scared.

P: (laughter) scared!?

K: Even Kay Graham (she was at the party last night) said you were outstanding last night. She didn't know why press wanted more conferences because you always got the better of them.

P: People are just trying to create an impression with someone who did not see it.

K: Substance and Non-substance—the impression you made was good. That bit about the mistake you made when _____ had no question and then you said we would go to the right or the left—whichever way you turned. It was great.

89. Backchannel Message From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Saigon, December 15, 1970, 1150Z.

993. To: The White House, Exclusively Eyes Only Dr. Kissinger.

1. I have completed detailed discussions with General Abrams and Ambassador Bunker of three-phase military operational concept discussed with you prior to departure. I have also discussed with Ambassador Bunker the political initiative which we will discuss with Thieu on Thursday December 17. General Abrams has assured me that he has discussed each of the phases with General Vien who has in turn cleared the concept with President Thieu. Ambassador Bunker has also been fully apprised and concurs wholeheartedly.

2. The first operation would involve an armor and infantry thrust westward along Route 7 to Chup Plantation. General Abrams has stepped up jump-off time from original estimate of 1 February to approximately 15 January. He states earlier jump-off would be impossible due to need for cross-country trafficability for armored vehicles as well as requirement of all involved forces to make necessary maintenance preparations. General Abrams thinks that this operation will

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1012, Haig Special File, Haig Trip File—Vietnam, Phnom Penh, December 11–18, 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. According to a trip report he prepared after his return, Haig traveled to Cambodia and Vietnam from December 13 to 18. (Ibid, Box 1011, Haig Special File, December 1970, Haig's Southeast Asia Trip [1 of 2])

cause maximum disruption in rear and in base areas of VC 9th Division and NVA 7th Division currently in the Route 6–7–Mekong triangle. As you know ARVN launched Kampong Cham relief operation yesterday and I am just informed initial contact has already been made south of Route 7 with what appears to be elements of 272 regiment. This operation is planned for termination in ten days but if it proves lucrative, as it well may, there is a good chance that General Tri will decide to coordinate Chup operation with linkup with forces now in Kampong Cham.

3. General Abrams this morning approved several raid proposals targeted against North Vietnam. He has been under great pressure from Admiral McCain to develop these plans. They have also been coordinated with VNAF through General Vien who is enthusiastic. General Abrams is somewhat skeptical of operations in North Vietnam which must depend on intelligence which lags by 45 days. For this reason, his proposal will probably be based on naval raids. I will speak with Admiral McCain and suggest that raid programs be timed for initiation concurrent with operations in Laos sometime in February.

4. General Abrams has just forwarded a proposal which has been coordinated fully with President Thieu and General Vien, and which was developed largely as a result of Vietnamese initiative.² General Abrams describes it as the most significant operation of the war thus far and one which he considers as potentially decisive. I will bring the details of the operation with me. In brief, it would involve a two-division ARVN force moving westward over Route 9 to Tchepone. General Abrams, President Thieu, and General Vien all feel strongly that Tchepone is the decisive target area in Laos which offers the most potentially lucrative results. General Abrams has considered both the Route 19 operations favored by General Westmoreland and the operation developed by ISA and he has rejected both as being marginally effective. In his view both of these plans provide an inadequate configuration of supplies given the disposition of enemy forces and the size of the target area. General Abrams is confident that Tchepone is

² In COMUSMACV message 15808 to McCain, December 12, Abrams outlined a plan for a joint U.S.-GVN operation into Laos "to sever the enemy LOC and achieve maximum destruction of enemy forces and stockpiles." On November 10, McCain sent him a draft concept plan for such an operation and on December 6 requested that he begin planning for a "major ARVN ground operation into the Laos panhandle, with maximum U.S. air support." On December 8, McCain authorized Abrams to begin planning efforts with General Vien. (Ibid., Box 1012, Haig Special File, Haig Trip File—Vietnam, Phnom Penh, December 11–18, 1970) McCain informed Moorer about the plan in CINCPAC message 150236Z, December 15, noting that he had asked Abrams to develop it and he approved his design wholeheartedly. (Ibid.)

the vital NVA/VC logistic nerve center providing logistic support not only to Cambodia and southern South Vietnam, but to Laos and I and II Corps as well. All here are extremely enthusiastic about this operation, even in view of obvious political difficulties which it will encounter in Washington.

5. In addition to the three operations described above, General Trung, Commanding General ARVN IV Corps, plans to initiate operations in southern Cambodia with the ARVN 9th Division starting 1 February. This operation according to Trung would be designed to engage the 1st NVA Division and will include an area of operations running as far west as Route 4 and will include operations around Takao and Kompot south to the coast.³

³ In his December 18 diary entry, Haldeman noted that Kissinger and the President discussed an operations plan in Laos in which the GVN would stage a "major attack this time without U.S. support, so it will be substantially different than Cambodia." (*The Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*)

90. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, December 16, 1970.

SUBJECT

Preliminary Assessment of Situation in Cambodia

Attached are three reports from General Haig containing his initial impressions of the situation in Cambodia. Among the more significant observations in the cables at Tabs A and B² are the following:

—There is a lack of information in the capital concerning the political and military situation in the rest of the country. Judgments are

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1011, Haig Special File, Haig's Southeast Asia Trip December 1970 [1 of 4]. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. A stamped notation reads, "The President has seen."

² Tab A is not attached but is attached to another copy of this memorandum. It is a retyped message from Haig to Kissinger, December 14. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 3, Chronological File 11/70) Tab B is attached but not printed. It is a retyped copy of backchannel message 992 from Haig at MACV to Kissinger, December 15. The original is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1012, Haig Special File, Haig Trip File—Vietnam, Phnom Penh, December 11–18, 1970.

often made on the basis of rumors or stale factual data. Steps are being taken to improve collection but efforts may also be necessary in Washington to insure Embassy personnel get out into the field.

—The military situation is serious but not critical.

—The enemy obviously is determined to carry the battle to the Cambodian army and their goal appears to be maximum attrition of Cambodian forces.

—Cambodian performance has been spotty. Tactics have been poor and command and control procedures weak. However, despite these shortcomings and recent setbacks there is no evidence of shaken confidence or morale problems. Lon Nol is much more self-assured but his basic confidence about the future may be somewhat unrealistic. Whether the enthusiasm and nationalism displayed is confined to the capitol, whether the basic optimism of the leaders is misplaced and whether a few serious military setbacks might unravel the situation is difficult to assess.

—Sirik Matak is very concerned about the impact of continuing interdiction of road and water arteries on the economy and political loyalty of the people. He believes, however, that Hanoi may be ready to negotiate and cited the Sontay Raid as a contributing factor.

—Among the immediate military needs are: improved capability for evacuation and care of wounded, some armor riverine forces to secure water supply routes, and improved South Vietnamese responsiveness to emergency requests. These and other Cambodian needs have been discussed with General Abrams and responsive measures are being taken in all areas. (See status report, Tab C).³

—A serious political problem is the continuing ARVN misbehavior in Cambodia.

—Under present circumstances it would not be wise for Mr. Ladd to return to Washington.

³ Attached but not printed is Tab C, a retyped copy of backchannel message 994 from Haig at MACV to Kissinger, December 15. The original is *ibid*.

91. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Saigon, December 17, 1970, 6 p.m.

SUBJECT

Meeting between President Thieu, Ambassador Bunker and General Haig

General Haig stated to President Thieu that he has requested the appointment to see him so that he would have an opportunity to explain to him the purpose of his visit to Cambodia and South Vietnam to outline the impressions gained during the visit and most importantly to bring to President Thieu a message from President Nixon.

President Thieu stated that he knew General Haig and his team had spent several days visiting Phnom Penh and that he was anxious to have their impressions.

General Haig stated that at the outset he wished to convey to President Thieu, President Nixon's warmest personal regards and his expression of admiration for the wise and effective leadership which President Thieu was providing to the Vietnamese people at this critical time. Further, President Nixon wishes President Thieu to be assured of his continuing support in his efforts to achieve our common goals. General Haig stated that while in Phnom Penh he had the benefit of extensive discussions with General Lon Nol and General Matak, as well as discussions with members of the U.S. country team. He stated that he found Lon Nol to be vigorous and confident, but at the same time, more conscious of, and sensitive to, the problems which lay ahead for Cambodia. In short, he had found that Lon Nol appeared to reflect a more realistic outlook than that manifested during General Haig's discussions with Lon Nol last Spring.² For example, last Spring Lon Nol had outlined ambitious plans for sweeping the enemy forces from Cambodia, this plan included Lon Nol's intention of launching an early offensive designed to clear the area surrounding Phnom Penh. The FANK could then proceed rapidly to expel the enemy from the occupied territory of northeast Cambodia. During this visit General Lon Nol confirmed that his forces were extremely limited in their offensive capabilities and stated that their interim strategy would have to be limited to defending the heavily populated and rice producing areas of Central and Southern Cambodia. His efforts must be confined to maintaining the viability of

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Haig Special Files, Box 1011, Haig Special File, Haig's Southeast Asia Trip December 1970 [1 of 2]. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. The meeting took place in the Presidential Palace.

² Haig visited Indochina in May. For his discussion with Lon Nol, see *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume VI, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Document 307.

the areas bordered roughly by Kompong Thong in the North, South on Route 6 to the capitol, East from the capitol on Route 7 to Khampong Cham, and West to Angkor Wat. Routes 1, 4, and 5 were included as vital arteries which would have to remain open.

General Haig stated that he was encouraged that General Lon Nol had adopted a far more realistic strategy for the immediate future. He stated that Lon Nol had requested certain military assistance items on an emergency basis, most of which had been already satisfied by Headquarters MACV. General Haig stated that the general impressions of his team were that General Lon Nol and his high command lacked time-sensitive intelligence on the military situation in the outlying areas. He stated that the team believed that greater efforts would have to be made by the U.S. Embassy, including the use of US assets in South Vietnam to help the Khmer Regime in this crucial area. The information on which decisions were being made by General Lon Nol was frequently based on out-dated intelligence or inaccurate rumor. General Haig stated that despite the fact that the situation in Cambodia had become quite serious, it was evident that the regime was still determined to carry the battle to the enemy and to maintain its resistance. General Haig stated that a serious problem that he had discussed with President Thieu last Spring still existed. While in Phnom Penh, there were continued references to the misbehaviour and thoughtless performance of RVN troops. Although the leadership there was very conscious of the need to prevent rumors of this kind from dominating the attitudes of the Cambodian people, it was very evident that both governments will have to concentrate maximum attention to this problem area. General Haig informed President Thieu that on Sunday,³ General Lon Nol had called in the Cambodian press to instruct them to avoid exaggerated reporting on this issue. General Haig added that Lon Nol had told him that it was very important that he continue to have responsive and positive South Vietnamese military support.

General Haig concluded his review of the situation in Cambodia by pointing out that his group considered the Cambodian military to be very weak, lacking in firepower and communications and, most importantly, lacking in experienced leadership at the company and battalion level. While dedication and determination were important ingredients, alone they could not defeat an experienced, wily, and dedicated enemy. Therefore, all in his group agreed that Cambodia must have in the near term, substantial help from both the United States and South Vietnam.

General Haig then turned to his team's impressions of the situation in South Vietnam. In sum, the group was encouraged by indications

³ December 13.

everywhere that the military and overall security situation was improving. It was obvious to all that the operations in Cambodia had resulted in great benefits for Vietnam, especially in the III and IV Corps areas. It was also evident that the prevention of the restoration of the former sanctuary areas in Cambodia was a key element in the progress South Vietnam would make in improving the security of the Southern Corps areas. General Haig stated that his team was encouraged by the obviously improved performance of the RF/PF and PSDF forces in those areas they were able to visit. This improved performance was the main factor which permitted VNAF main forces to bring the battle to the enemy within heretofore safe-haven sanctuary base areas in South Vietnam and in Cambodia as well. General Haig stated that the performance of the RVNAF was especially encouraging. Unquestionably, the performance of the ARVN and the Air Force in the Khampong Cham area constituted a remarkable feat of professionalism and augered well for the future.

General Haig recalled that last Spring he had asked President Thieu to continue efforts to improve the quality of the ARVN leadership.⁴ He was pleased to note that great progress had been made. Everywhere the team had observed and heard of the skill and dedication of the ARVN Corps and division commanders and the effectiveness of the JGS. Obviously, there were still some minor exceptions to this improved quality but in general the team could now reassure President Nixon that this nagging problem of earlier years had been eliminated by President Thieu's decisive leadership.

General Haig turned next to the economic and political situation in South Vietnam. He noted that the team was encouraged by the results of recent economic measures but recognized that this was a difficult and complex problem which would require continued U.S. assistance and intense efforts by all, especially as the U.S. physical presence continued to decline.

General Haig noted that the recent visit of Vice President Ky to the U.S. had achieved a success which surpassed everyone's hopes.⁵ The Vice President's performance and reception had achieved a positive impact everywhere. General Haig stated that his team had been pleased to note a general atmosphere of support for the South Vietnam constitution and had been impressed by the *obvious* continued extension of central authority and presence into the countryside. General Haig stated that President Nixon was pleased with the results of the U.S. Congressional elections as they reflected a trend toward increasing support for the President's foreign policy. The recent Congressional

⁴ See *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume VI, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Document 309.

⁵ See Document 76.

approval of the President's supplemental request was evidence of the shifting U.S. attitude. Despite the favorable trend, it was obvious that the forthcoming U.S. Presidential contest would generate more emphasis on the traditional *domestic criticism* of the South Vietnamese government. It was, therefore, especially important that some progress be shown in combatting corruption in SVN. It was obvious that President Nixon's political opponents would continue to exploit this issue as our *domestic* campaign began to gain momentum. This same phenomenon would make continuing progress on land reform, justice and the equitable distribution of economic benefits obvious focal points for attack in the U.S. domestic scene.

General Haig then turned to President Nixon's strategy for the ensuing dry season. General Haig stated that President Nixon had discussed this problem with Dr. Kissinger and Secretary Laird and that he had concluded that allied forces must not permit the enemy to have free reign in carrying out his offensive plans. Rather, President Nixon favored preemptive offensive operations as best designed to attrit the enemy, disrupt his timetable and improve Cambodia's prospects for survival. Offensive gains on our part would also strengthen President Thieu's government and ultimately contribute to the success of the Vietnamization program. For this reason, President Nixon and Dr. Kissinger had asked General Haig to discuss the allied dry season campaign with President Thieu and General Abrams when General Haig arrived in Saigon. It was quite evident that President Thieu, Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams and Vien were already well down the road toward developing a bold and imaginative dry season offensive strategy designed to carry the battle to the enemy. General Haig stated that President Nixon visualized a three-phased offensive which would include swift ARVN thrusts into Southern and Central Cambodia designed to afford prompt relief to the Cambodian Government and to prevent the reestablishment of the sanctuary areas along Cambodia's border with SVN, thereby facilitating continued progress in pacification throughout III and IV Corps. Secondly, the President visualized a bold and imaginative thrust into the enemy's logistic nerve center either in Northeastern Cambodia or Southern Laos in the Bolevens area. However, during General Haig's first meeting with General Abrams, he learned that President Thieu and General Vien had already concluded that a two-division thrust into Tchepone over Route 9 would achieve even greater results. Finally, General Haig stated President Nixon hoped that the South Vietnamese could institute a covert raid program during the Laotian operation designed to freeze enemy reserves in North Vietnam and bring home to the enemy its own susceptibility to allied counteraction within North Vietnamese territory.

General Haig stated that President Nixon hoped that an imaginative and effective military campaign of this type could be implemented

and that the operations along Route 7 could begin as early as January 15 and the Laotian operation just after Tet in early February. The raids against North Vietnam to be conducted consecutively with and under the cover of the Laotian operation. We also visualized that a concurrent political scenario could be followed designed to place the greatest possible pressure on Hanoi and facilitate overcoming the political difficulties which stepped-up allied operations could generate. Specifically, we recalled that Ambassador Bunker had mentioned this fall that President Thieu had been considering a political initiative of this type.⁶ Further, Vice President Ky during his discussions with President Nixon and Dr. Kissinger had mentioned such a political initiative. We, of course, expected that President Thieu would be the ultimate authority for such an initiative both as to its modalities and character and its timing. However, we were thinking of a proposal along the following lines:

—One designed to enhance the authority and manifest the strength and confidence of the Thieu Government.

—One which would reinforce the present constitution.

—One which could serve as a demonstration of the peaceful intent of the Thieu Government.

—One which could be implemented in whole or partially by the GVN despite its reception by the other side and with maximum international fanfare.

We visualize the specifics of such an initiative as follows:

—Sometime in January, hopefully before the Cambodian offensive, President Thieu would offer to discuss with the NLF the conditions under which they might participate in the Lower House and Presidential elections of 1971.

—Recognizing that the NLF might well refuse to enter into such discussions, President Thieu might then in March or April unilaterally invite the NLF to present a list of candidates to add to those already presented under the provisions of the electoral law.

—Concurrently, President Thieu might invite, through the United Nations or appropriate allies, international observers to visit South Vietnam to witness and judge the fairness of the coming elections.

The foregoing initiative would, of course, be worked out in detail between President Thieu and Ambassador Bunker and we would hope consultations leading toward such an initiative could commence as soon as possible.

President Thieu stated that he was grateful to President Nixon for his kind message and welcomed the visit of General Haig and his team.

⁶ See Document 68 and footnote 4 thereto.

He stated that the Cambodian situation was the subject of some concern to him, especially as U.S. forces continue to be withdrawn. He stated that the introduction of ARVN Airborne Forces into Kampong Cham could modify the nature and timing of future ARVN operations in Cambodia. The Cambodian forces are very weak, lack leadership and do not seem to comprehend the nature of the enemy they are engaging. Furthermore, the Cambodians have not gone about solving their problems in a realistic way. They have not yet devised a military plan and strategy for the defense of Cambodia. They have neglected completely the need to conduct this war on both the military and political front. They must realize that the enemy will turn the people against them and, therefore, they need a pacification program such as that being followed in South Vietnam. Until the Cambodians have such a strategy they will be forced to call for South Vietnamese help in emergency after emergency. They cannot expect us to respond to each call at the expense of our own security.

During the most recent operation, the South Vietnamese had been forced to do everything on their own with little U.S. air support. Future operations in Cambodia must be fully supported by the U.S., both with air support and logistic support. Also, ARVN would need to borrow POL tankers to support its armored elements. President Thieu then recalled his discussions with General Lon Nol, during which he told Lon Nol that for now Cambodia's greatest need was a realistic plan and the maintenance of Route 1 which would keep ARVN forces and supplies only 6 hours away. Since then, the ARVN has kept Route 1 open but no plan has been forthcoming.

General Haig stated he was somewhat encouraged that General Lon Nol now appeared to realize that his strategy must be firmed up and that it must be a modest one. In this regard, General Abrams had told him that a new military triumvirate would be established which would include General Weyand, General Mahn and an appropriate Cambodian counterpart. General Haig hoped it would be General Satsukan. This group could meet regularly and do much to improve Cambodian planning and performance and improve coordination between all sides. General Haig stated he would raise the issue of U.S. support to ARVN as soon as he returned to Washington.

President Thieu stated that his operations in Cambodia posed serious political and military problems. The enemy he believed was intent on achieving some kind of victory before the elections in October and this would be designed to shatter the peoples' confidence in the government and also to influence the U.S. electorate. He was certain that they were building to do this now. Yet the United States continued to withdraw its forces at a precipitous rate. How could we expect him to move large elements from III Corps into Cambodia when we are stripping our forces down to one brigade and one Cav Squadron which General Abrams

says must be used largely to protect its own bases? President Thieu continued by pointing out that the people of South Vietnam could not understand the continued withdrawal of U.S. forces as ARVN forces operate at extended distances in Cambodia. President Thieu stated that if the United States expected him to do the job in Cambodia and Southern Laos then he wanted the following things: The draw-down of U.S. forces between 1 May and 1 July should be very modest. More importantly, the U.S. should then hold its troops at a steady level until the elections are over in October. The U.S. could, of course, announce a long-term program for the next increment but the removal of forces should not begin until after elections. In this way, the South Vietnamese people will be assured of some security while the ARVN is busy in Cambodia.

Concerning the political initiative, President Thieu agreed that a proposal could be developed but that he would have to consider carefully the nature of the proposal, as well as its timing. He believed that the proposal might come after the Chup operation and not before so as to gain maximum political impact. For example, if the Chup operation succeeds, then the appearance of reasonableness by a victorious government seemed to him most attractive. He would have to work hard on specifics because the initiative could not be warmed over milk.

Ambassador Bunker stated he was confident that we could work together to prepare a novel and effective proposal.

President Thieu indicated he would start planning now. He then asked General Haig for his opinion of the political climate.

General Haig stated that at home the war issue had quieted down somewhat. However, President Nixon's upcoming elections would likely raise again all of the old issues, especially that of corruption. In short, we are in a somewhat better position but one which was fragile and could be shortlived in the face of a setback in Cambodia, South Vietnam or the failure to take action against corruption.

President Thieu stated his problem had much to do with the court system and the Minister of Justice. Some corruption cases had not been brought to trial. Now there was a new Minister and he looked forward to some movement in this area. Thieu added facetiously to the effect that the U.S. had urged democracy on the South Vietnamese and now the government is inhibited in its ability to act. President Thieu then commented on the efforts to prepare the new electoral law. He stated the main need was to reduce the number of Presidential Candidates. Parties could not develop under the present law; therefore, it must be changed. Actually, President Thieu continued, he would favor a two-party system. In this way, effective parties would evolve, one on the left and one on the right, and a more effectual and stable government would result. President Thieu stated the new law would also allow only one month of campaigning.

General Haig stated that he would bring President Thieu's concerns about our future withdrawals to the President's attention.

President Thieu then stated he believed the withdrawal of U.S. forces had raised some serious concerns among the people. Therefore, he believed it would be necessary for the government to prepare a long-range economic plan which would reflect continued U.S. participation. As your forces are withdrawn, the people must know you are not abandoning South Vietnam. Therefore, such a plan is an urgent necessity. The President then asked General Haig to extend his warmest personal regards to President Nixon and the meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

92. Conclusions and Recommendations From a Report by the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)¹

Washington, undated.

Major Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

1. We have serious shortcomings in our intelligence outside Phnom Penh in Cambodia and do not have a good feel for military or political developments.

2. The Cambodians continue to show national unity and high morale among the people and government and their army is much larger and somewhat better equipped. However, in order to prevent the fall of the country and the reestablishment of base areas that could threaten III and IV Corps in Vietnam, substantial outside assistance from South Vietnam, the United States and others will be required over the near term.

3. There is a need for greater coordination of military efforts by Cambodia, South Vietnam and the United States.

4. Tales of ARVN misbehavior and GVN condescension are rampant in Phnom Penh. Khmer-Vietnamese animosity is a major problem

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 511, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. XII. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Kissinger initialed the report. A note on another copy indicates that it was typed on December 21. (Ibid., Box 1011, Haig Special File, Haig Southeast Asia Trip [1 of 4]) A draft of the full trip report, including the major conclusions and recommendations, is *ibid.*, December 1970 Haig's Southeast Asia Trip [1 of 2]. A final version of the trip report was not found.

and could threaten the political base of the Lon Nol Government which must continue to rely on the ARVN for assistance.

5. The major problem for Cambodia's economy is the military situation, in particular the transportation difficulties caused by the enemy's cutoff of major roads. In this context freeing access to Phnom Penh, as well as curbing inflation, is more crucial than greater US aid levels.

6. In South Vietnam the security and pacification situation shows marked improvement, although the VCI remains a stubborn problem which only years of effort can solve.

7. Thieu is receptive to proposed ARVN operations in Cambodia and Southern Laos² but insists on US air and logistical support as conditions.

He also emphasized the risk of conducting these operations while US troop levels are going down and asked that there be modest US withdrawals between May and July 1971 and no US withdrawals between July and the October Presidential election. (The present MACV plan provided for a troop level of 284,000 by May 1 and 255,000 by July 1.) President Thieu suggested that US might wish to make a long term troop withdrawal announcement this spring which would permit it to maintain its 1 July levels through the South Vietnamese October election and initiate drawdowns subsequent to that date.

8. The constitutional system has taken hold in Vietnam and there is much political activity looking toward the October elections, where Thieu and Minh are likely to be the two major candidates. The former will have the advantages of incumbency, stability and a generally good record, while the latter commands much popularity and could exploit the issues of corruption and desire for peace.

9. Thieu wants to consider carefully any political proposals without benefit of this consideration, he favors delay in making any initiative until after the Chup operation in mid-January.

10. There has been some improvement in the short term economic situation, but the long term outlook remains very serious. Almost all Vietnamese cite economic problems as the most difficult ones now facing the GVN.

11. The drug problem among our forces in Vietnam is pervasive. It has received serious attention only since July; we have merely iden-

² As for the northernmost military operation, US and Vietnamese officials favor the Route 9 Tchepone plan. They believe it would be more remunerative than either the Route 19 plan in Northern Cambodia (which could leave an exposed flank to enemy forces in Southern Laos) or the Bolovens Plan (where enemy forces are more dispersed). They say that it would be easier to resupply and protect friendly forces from Vietnamese bases; there would be a greater concentration of enemy supplies; and there would be greater physical and psychological damage inflicted on the enemy. [Footnote in the original.]

tified the magnitude of the problem and taken the first few corrective actions. The problem should be susceptible to positive command actions and not become a factor in troop level decisions.

Recommendations

1. Modify our ground rules for collecting intelligence in Cambodia, to include much more extensive travel in the countryside by Defense Attachés and others.

2. Provide more technical military advice in Cambodia and in Vietnam. Establish a greater dialogue with the Cambodians while stopping short of military advisors.

3. Effect high level coordination of military efforts through the triumvirate of General Weyand for the US, General Mahn for the Vietnamese, and an appropriate Cambodian counterpart. Our Ambassador should be kept fully informed and be an active participant in the coordination effort, including the acceptance of regular visits by General Weyand to Phnom Penh in civilian clothes.

4. Fulfill to the extent feasible Lon Nol's specific material requests made during the visit many of which have already been covered by MACV.

5. Continue US air support in Cambodia but make every effort to insure that it avoids non-combatants and sticks to the enemy and his supplies.

6. Emphasize greatly to both Governments the need to reduce Khmer-Vietnamese frictions and promote cooperation.

7. Do not raise our economic assistance above present levels which is all the economy can absorb and insulate our aid from inflation.

8. Proceed with plans for operations in southern Cambodia from IV Corps and central Cambodia from III Corps. Also proceed on a restricted basis with plans for operations in southern Laos. Plans should include US tactical air including helicopter gun ship support, logistic airlift and logistic and artillery support based in South Vietnam. Raids into Northern Vietnam should be primarily coastal rather than against overly ambitious and costly inland targets, and should be coordinated with the Laotian operation rather than taking place before it.

9. Work out a political scenario to accompany these military moves. Ambassador Bunker should coordinate with Thieu on a political initiative, with the timing left to Thieu. This initiative should be within the framework of the constitutional system and should be implemented in part unilaterally.

10. Aim for US troop levels of 284,000 by May 1 and 255,000 by July 1. Hold off further withdrawal decisions until assessments are made of the results of the up-coming Cambodian and Southern Laos operations.

11. Continue to emphasize to the GVN the need to move against corruption.

12. Begin to draw up a long range economic assistance plan for South Vietnam.

13. In coordination with the South Vietnamese, mount a much more extensive campaign against the drug problem in South Vietnam.

93. Memorandum Prepared by Admiral R.C. Robinson of the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff¹

Washington, December 22, 1970.

Subj: Memorandum of Conversation

1. Dr. Kissinger and Adm Moorer met in the White House at 1200 today to discuss the status of contingency planning for SEA. BG Haig and RAdm Robinson were in attendance.

2. Dr. Kissinger requested Adm Moorer to brief him on the concept for the use of ARVN forces in Laos. Adm Moorer described this plan as involving four phases:

—*Phase I.* A US-reinforced brigade would conduct operations along Route 9 from the East to the ARVN/Laotian Border, and establish a forward operating base and airfield to facilitate future operations to the West.

—*Phase II.* Upon completion of Phase I, RVNAF elements would conduct limited objective attacks in the vicinity of Tchepone. Saturation bombing would be conducted in the area followed by the seizure of Tchepone Airfield.

—*Phase III.* RVNAF engineers would upgrade the airfield for C123 operations and blocking positions would be established to the North. Enemy stockpiles would be destroyed in the vicinity of Base Area 604.

—*Phase IV.* FAR, guerillas and RVNAF elements would be inserted into or remain in the objective area.

3. Dr. Kissinger then asked whether the operation would result in the destruction of significant enemy stockpiles. Adm Moorer answered in the affirmative, stating that Gen Abrams selected the Tchepone area

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Moorer Diary, July 1970–July 1974. Top Secret; Eyes Only. This memorandum is attached to Admiral Moorer's December 22 diary entry.

because it contains many lucrative targets. With respect to the timing of this operation, Adm Moorer advised that it could commence shortly after Tet—around the early part of February. Dr. Kissinger commented that “the earlier the better,” and added that the only chance we have is to initiate bold moves against the enemy. Adm Moorer agreed, noting that because of budget problems and planned troop withdrawals, we only have until next Spring to take such initiatives.

4. The discussion then turned to the scope of US military support for such an operation. Both Adm Moorer and Haig pointed out that Gen Abrams will need authority to use the full range of US air support, to include tactical and strategic bombing, airlift and gunships. Dr. Kissinger said that he would do his best to get the authorities we need, and that in the interim we should continue our planning on the basis that such authority will be forthcoming. He said that he would try to get Presidential approval for these authorities within the next day or so. In this connection, he felt that the only restriction would be against the use of US ground forces, but such a restriction would not prevent the landing and take-off of helicopters.

5. The need for early consultation with SecDef was emphasized, particularly in view of his forthcoming trip to SEA where discussions with President Thieu on this matter would be inevitable. Adm Moorer recommended that the President call an early meeting for the purpose of setting forth his views. HAK thought that it would be best to arrange such a session on Sunday, 3 January just prior to SecDef’s departure. Both Adm Moorer and Haig felt that such a delay would be untenable, especially in view of the fact that Haig’s views on his recent trip are already being requested by SecDef’s office. HAK concurred in the need for an earlier meeting and said that he and Haig would discuss this matter with the President today and that a meeting between the President, SecDef, CJCS and himself, would be held on Wednesday or Thursday.² HAK confirmed this tentative schedule by telephone with the President’s office (I think with Bob Haldeman). During this meeting of the principals the President will be asked to raise the issue of future operations within the context of Haig’s recent trip. Specifically, he would say that he had asked Haig to look into the various options available, and he had found an interesting plan involving the insertion of ARVN troops into the Tchepone area. Since this initiative looked far more productive than some of the others discussed by the WSAG, he had decided to proceed with the detailed planning and wanted the necessary directive issued as a matter of priority. Haig noted that

² December 30 or 31.

he had determined a number of views during his trip, including the following:

—Ambassador Godley had sent a proposal similar to the Tchepone Plan to Alex Johnson in early December. Johnson shelved the matter as “preposterous”.

—Souvanna would support the Plan, but would want solid assurance that the US was completely behind the operation. He would be more concerned about the *duration* of the operation than the fact that ARVN forces would enter Laos.

—Ambassador Bunker strongly favored the Plan and recalled that it was very similar to one that he had brought back to Washington with Gen Westmoreland several years ago.

6. RAdm Robinson pointed out that the same authorities envisioned for the Tchepone operation would be necessary in a lesser degree for the move into the Chup Plantation. HAK foresaw no difficulty in obtaining Presidential permission for the use of US airlift support for this operation. Robinson then noted that the extent of ARVN planning for both operations might easily surface in the form of a CAS Report, thus revealing the concept to all Washington subscribers. HAK directed Haig to call in Bob Cushman and make it clear that CIA will not publish any report on prospective operations out of SVN into Laos without first obtaining White House permission.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to contingency planning in Southeast Asia.]

Very respectfully,

R. C. Robinson³

³ Admiral Robinson initialed “RCR” above his typed signature.

94. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, December 22, 1970.

PARTICIPANTS

Henry A. Kissinger and Ambassador Anatole Dobrynin

The lunch lasted about three and a half hours and took place in an extremely cordial atmosphere. During the course of the luncheon the discussion covered the general state of U.S.-Soviet relations as well as a number of specific topics including the Middle East, Vietnam, SALT and Cuba.

[Omitted here is brief discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

Vietnam. Finally Dobrynin turned to Vietnam. He said he had always criticized me for the linkage theory, but he was beginning to think that there was something to it. He then read me the attached statement on Vietnam, which he said was in response to the President's Press Conference.² The statement which was very conciliatory in tone read as follows:

The events of the last few weeks in the area of Indochina as well as some statements by US leaders can hardly be viewed other than as an evidence that the Nixon Administration is going back on the course it earlier proclaimed, for a settlement of the Vietnam problem by political means. To embark on the path leading to a new expansion of military actions in Indochina means to ignore the entire record of that war as well as to throw far behind the attainment of a settlement in Vietnam.

Negotiations alone, searching for mutually acceptable solutions on the basis of respect for lawful rights of the people of that country are, in the profound conviction of the Soviet leaders, the only thing that can put an end to the conflict in Vietnam. We have reasons to believe that similar views are shared also by our Vietnamese friends. But no progress whatsoever in the negotiations may be counted upon when one side is trying to impose on the other participants its will with the help of military ultimatums.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 490, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin-Kissinger, 1970, Vol. 3. Top Secret; Sensitive. The conversation took place in the White House Map Room. Kissinger forwarded this memorandum to the President under an undated covering memorandum, along with the original of a note from the Soviet Union to the United States on its bombing raids in the DRV. Both the memorandum of conversation and covering memorandum are printed in full in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIII, Soviet Union, October 1970–October 1971, Document 74.

² The press conference was held December 10; see *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pp. 1101–1111.

Clear also is the fact that such course of actions by the US, violation by them of the assumed obligations, in this case—with regard to stopping the bombings and other military actions against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam—can in no way facilitate trust in international relations. Quite the contrary, in view of the idea repeatedly expressed by US officials about a global linkage of problems, it is hard to avoid asking oneself the following question: if the US are leading the way toward complication in the area of Indochina does it not mean that for some reasons they want an aggravation of the international situation as a whole.

The Soviet Government is of the view that the efforts of our countries should be aimed at peaceful solution of disputes and removal of sources of international tension. Our relations cannot but be affected by whether there is progress in peaceful settlement of existing conflicts or this cause is going backward. The Soviet Union will not remain indifferent to whatever attempts are made to implement the threats against the fraternal Socialist country.

I replied that, first, in the recent communication from Moscow after the bombing of North Vietnam, there seemed to be a misunderstanding about what the President had told Gromyko.³ The President had not said that he would not let Vietnam interfere with Soviet/American relations. The President had clearly pointed out that if the North Vietnamese continued to press military actions, we would have no choice except to react very strongly, and he hoped that, in that case, the Soviet Union would recognize that the action was not directed against it.

Dobrynin then commented that the Soviet Government hoped we understood the limits of their influence in Hanoi, given the whole combination of circumstances. I said the tragedy was that there was no possibility for military victory anymore by North Vietnam—that if the war went on another two or three years, the outcome would still be essentially the same as it is now. If the Soviet Union wanted to use its influence for negotiations, now was the time. This was the best way to prevent a deterioration of US/Soviet relationships. I would have to tell him, without a threat but in all fairness, that we would simply not sit by while the North Vietnamese were building up for an offensive. On the other hand, the second paragraph of his statement seemed to me perfectly appropriate, and we could agree to it completely as a statement of our principles.

Dobrynin then asked me whether we would agree to a coalition government. I replied that North Vietnam had not asked for a coalition government. It had asked for a government in which they nominated a third, and vetoed the other two-thirds. Dobrynin asked me whether we would accept a coalition government in which we could nominate a third and the other side could nominate a third. I said it

³ See Document 58.

seemed to me that the issue was wrongly approached in this manner. We had made clear that we were prepared to accept the solution that reflected the real balance of forces, and we had made some proposals along this line. We would certainly listen to counter-proposals, but they had to be realistic and not be a subterfuge for a Communist take-over. If the Soviet Union would be prepared to enter the negotiating process seriously, I could promise them that (1) we would not embarrass them, and (2) that we would make serious replies to serious proposals.

[Omitted here is a brief discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

95. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, December 23, 1970.

SUBJECT

Meeting with Secretary of Defense Laird, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Moorer and Henry A. Kissinger

Purpose of the Meeting

As a followup of our meeting yesterday afternoon,² you are scheduled to meet with Secretary Laird, Admiral Moorer and myself at 9:15 a.m. this morning.³

During his trip to Saigon and Phnom Penh, General Haig discussed with General Abrams, Ambassador Bunker, Ambassador Godley and President Thieu ARVN's dry season campaign plan for operations in Cambodia.⁴ Admiral Moorer is aware of the details of this

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 226, Agency Files, Department of Defense, Vol. X. Top Secret; Sensitive. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² In his December 22 diary entry, Haldeman noted that Kissinger and Nixon met to discuss the Laos operation. Kissinger proposed that Nixon meet that day with Haig to discuss the plan and then the next day with Laird and Moorer "to force Laird and the military to go ahead with the P's plans, which they won't carry out without direct orders." (*The Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*) Kissinger noted in *Ending the Vietnam War* (p. 193) that he and Haig met with Nixon to discuss Haig's report (see Document 92), and the President's Daily Diary of December 22 lists the meeting at 4:30–5:32 p.m. in the Oval Office. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files) No other record of the meeting has been found.

³ See Document 96.

⁴ See Document 91.

planning which has been proceeding without the full knowledge of Secretary Laird especially with respect to the plan for Southern Laos. Therefore, it is important that at this morning's meeting your decision to proceed with the planning for these operations be conveyed as having resulted from General Haig's trip report to you and not as a result of any prior liaison with the Chairman or the military.

The second issue to be discussed at the meeting is the provision of authorities for the nature and scope of U.S. support of South Vietnamese forces during the execution of these plans. It is important that Secretary Laird and Admiral Moorer understand completely the nature of U.S. support so that General Abrams will be able to initiate his planning with the South Vietnamese within the parameters which you have approved.

Conduct of the Meeting

I recommend that you tell the group that you have called them together to discuss some conceptual plans for the dry season in Southeast Asia which General Haig has learned of as a result of his discussions with the U.S. and South Vietnamese leaders. You should then ask me to brief these plans for the group. I would then proceed to do so raising the issue of necessary authorities which you must grant for U.S. support.

Talking Points

—Inform the group that you have convened this meeting to discuss your concept for dry season offensive by ARVN and U.S. forces in Southeast Asia.

—You are convinced that the enemy will make every effort to inflict a military and psychological setback on the ARVN prior to the South Vietnamese elections in October. If possible, they will also attempt to inflict higher casualties on U.S. forces with the view towards eroding U.S. domestic support for our Vietnam policies. For this reason it is important that we maintain the momentum achieved by the Vietnamization program and the Cambodian operations last spring.

—You consider that the past performance of the enemy confirms that he is vulnerable to unpredictable action by us and is characteristically unable to react flexibly when we seize the initiative. For this reason you are determined to adopt the strategy of pre-emptive offensive action designed to disrupt the enemy to the maximum effort during the coming dry season.

—You are aware that a number of contingency plans have been considered in the Washington Special Actions Group for possible adoption during the coming dry season. In addition, General Haig has obtained for you the best thinking of General Abrams and President Thieu with respect to bold offensive action by Allied forces.

—Ask Dr. Kissinger to outline for the group the menu of offensive plans on which you wish detailed planning to commence immediately. (Dr. Kissinger will cover the points outlined at Tab A.)⁵

—At the conclusion of Dr. Kissinger’s briefing and your approval of specific authorities listed by Dr. Kissinger, you may wish to caution Secretary Laird and Admiral Moorer that for the time being you want the planning to be conducted on the closest hold basis. You do not wish it discussed with any other officials except those with the absolute need-to-know. You anticipate that access lists will be maintained both within the Department of Defense and the Joint Staff.

—Finally, you do not anticipate that it will be necessary to share this information with the Secretary of State till somewhat later during the planning process and at a time of your choice.

⁵ Attached but not printed.

96. Memorandum for the Record¹

CJCS Memo M–218–70

Washington, December 23, 1970.

Subj: Conference with President Nixon, this date

1. *Present*: The President, SecDef, Kissinger, CJCS, BG Haig.²
2. The President opened the discussion by stating that he wanted to talk to SecDef and CJCS prior to our trip to SEA.³ The President stated that Haig had talked to Gen Abrams concerning some plans for operations in the Spring, and then asked whether Ambassador Bunker

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Moorer Diary, July 1970–July 1974. Sensitive; Hold Close Original and Only Copy. Prepared by Moorer.

² The President’s Daily Diary indicates that this meeting took place from 9:20 to 10:15 a.m. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files) Kissinger recalled that in proposing dry season operations in Laos and Cambodia “Nixon was determined not to stand naked in front of his opponents, as he had the year before over Cambodia,” and “conceived of the idea of first inducing Laird to propose what Nixon preferred” so that Laird would become his advocate in the NSC. Kissinger assumed that Laird knew about the plan and supported it, believing it would buy at least a year and prove the success of Vietnamization. Nixon, he noted, was vastly relieved by Laird’s receptivity. (Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, pp. 193–195)

³ Laird and Moorer were scheduled to travel to Saigon on January 5, 1971. See Document 104.

had passed plans to State and was told “*negative*.” The President said that he would personally discuss with SecState after we returned. The discussion was then turned over to Haig.

3. Haig opened the discussion by stating that the Attachés are held too tightly; that intelligence in Cambodia is no good and that it is derived secondhand and, in many cases, from the press. He said that Ambassador Swank is doing well but he needs different guidance.

4. The President directed that we open up the guidance. Specifically: “We must have intelligence and pay the price to get it.”

5. The discussion then revolved around the concept of the military equipment delivery teams. I pointed out to the PresUS that we had a plan for the use of these teams which would involve shuttling back and forth from Vietnam to Phnom Penh. The PresUS said these teams should be used to augment our intelligence collection and that in our press guidance we should say that they are delivering equipment contained in the approved MAP Program and that we have a legal responsibility to determine its disposition and use and that this activity does not constitute, in any way, a MAAG.

6. The PresUS then made the flat statement, “*The military equipment delivery teams are approved as of right now.*” SecDef told the PresUS that he had testified in Congress that they were required but that State had resisted introduction of additional personnel into Phnom Penh. When queried about numbers, I said that we have been looking at numbers all the way up to 100 and after some discussion it was agreed that, as a starter, we could put about 20 in Phnom Penh and retain 30 or 40 in Vietnam which would shuttle back and forth.

Note: Prepare a plan for presentation to SecDef—check with the White House as to how and when State will receive the Presidential Directive on this matter.

7. The PresUS then said that it is clear that the Cambodians need assistance from the ARVN and that Haig had discussed some plans with Abrams similar to those previously reviewed by the WSAG. The PresUS then said that, in his view, at the present time we can continue Vietnamization on schedule, although he recognizes that the Cambodians will receive some punishment during the next several months. He said now that we have come this far we must find a way for SVN to survive in the long term. He said we are talking about victory in one sense, although we do not mention this publicly. Certainly we cannot go out with a whimper. Therefore, we need some preemptive action during the next few months which the PresUS considers to be critical to our overall effort. He stated that if we had taken bold action three years ago that we would not be in the serious position we are in today (I agree).

8. Haig then stated that we were looking at four plans:

- a. An operation by the 9th ARVN Division to clear out Route 4.
- b. An excursion into the Chup Plantation area commencing 15 Jan.
- c. An attack up Highway #9 to Tchepone (this latter plan has been recommended before but this time there is a difference—it will be conducted by ARVN rather than US troops).
- d. Covert operations against NVN.

Haig stated that in the above plans it is envisioned that we will give full air support but no US ground forces will be used.

9. I then brought up the subject of airlift, stating that in the Kompong Cham Operation the full capability of the SVN had been used and, therefore, in the operation of the size which we were discussing it would be necessary to provide helicopter lift support in addition to all other kinds of air support to the SVN. At this time the PresUS did not come out with straight approval but suggested that this airlift would be correct as long as it was directed towards the airlift of supplies and could be used to support the Cambodians also. I stated that in the Chup Plantation Operation it was envisioned that we would open Highway #7 and then turn over to the Cambodians the task of maintaining security of the road; however, I still thought that a significant amount of helicopter airlift would be necessary in order for the operation to succeed.

10. The conversation then diverted to a statement by the PresUS that he understands that during the Kompong Cham Operation that Gen Abrams thought that he did not have authority to use helicopter gunships and it was reported to them that such use would have resulted in major casualties to the NVN. He went on to say "*whenever they are authorized to use air of any kind then the use of the helicopter gunships is also authorized.*" (I will have to check on Haig's report⁴ that they could have "killed hundreds of NVN at Kompong Cham if they had helicopter gunships." It is my view that they did have authority from the outset).

11. The PresUS stated again that he would bring SecState in on the plans after SecDef returned from SVN. He then went on to say that our overall objective during the months of February, March and April is to take the heat and take the risks and then, when the heat is at its highest level we will announce additional withdrawals (below the 284,000) if warranted.

12. The PresUS then quoted Haig as stating there had been a real change—that SecDef and I would be amazed at the change in the attitude of the SVN—even the Kompong Cham Operation had added to their confidence.

⁴ See Document 92.

13. The PresUS then stated that our plans of operation next spring should have as their objective an enduring Vietnam, namely, one that can stand up in the future; therefore, we must give the NVN a bang. *He stated that the Chup Plantation Operation is approved* and that we will study the move against Tchepone later. He stated that Godley and others will state that this will draw in the Chinese and Russians but that Godley has been saying things like this for a long time. I noted that this is not an invasion or an occupation effort but, namely, an operation designed to block the flow of supplies and destroy those in the area.

14. I stated that the operation must succeed and, therefore, we should take such risks as are necessary. The President then said, "Let it succeed with a minimum low-key operation so far as US forces are concerned." He then turned to SecDef and asked his opinion of the Laotian Operation. *SecDef: "Let's take a crack at it."*

15. The PresUS then turned to the authority that we had sought to strike at missile sites, which he had turned down. He said he wanted to get his philosophy across to all so far as NVN is concerned. He is not going to follow a "tit-for-tat" policy; what he has in mind is to make a significant strike on choke points the same time we conduct the Chup Operation. We will not justify this on the basis of "protective reaction" but, rather, on the basis that while we are cutting down the enemy is building up and, consequently, cannot tolerate this.

16. We then turned to the covert raid on NVN by SVN. The President stated that these have the psychological purpose and that he asked SecDef whether he had looked at the proposals, particularly the one directed at the dredge operations in Haiphong Harbor. SecDef said that he had been looking at this for six years. *The PresUS said don't turn it down* and then restated that from January 1 to April we can break the back of the enemy. *He went on to say that any feasible moves designed for this purpose will be authorized and we must "use forces necessary to make operations succeed."*

17. At this point I again brought up the question of helicopter lift. I stated that if we are going to go ahead with the Chup Plantation Operation we must give Gen Abrams his guidance now; that in my view he would find it necessary to use US helicopters to lift SVN troops. SecDef said that we could use the language used in the last message⁵ and work this out. I repeated once again that this operation as well as the Tchepone Operation was quite different from the Kompong Cham Operation, and that if the operation was to succeed and if planning was to be completed by 15 January we needed to give Abrams some latitude. (This is a key point with respect to the conduct of both of these

⁵ See footnote 2, Document 89.

operations. I did not press all the way at this time since I was concerned about the possibility of reducing the scope of the operations. I do not think we should do them at all if we can't do them right.)

18. *Note:* During the course of the conversation I brought up the subject to SecDef who, in turn, took it up with the PresUS, of my invitation to visit Godley. It was agreed that such a visit prior to the Tchepone Operations might cause us difficulties and, consequently, it was thought best that I not accept this invitation. I will pass my regrets to Ambassador Godley.

T.H. Moorer⁶

⁶ Moorer initialed "TM" above his typed signature.

97. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

Policy Regarding the Use of Herbicides in Vietnam and Public Release

Dr. David recently recommended (Tab F)² that we adopt a policy which would establish the same standards for the use of herbicides in Vietnam as are in effect in the United States.

Secretary Laird has written you (Tab C)³ stating that:

—At your direction, actions have been taken to reduce the use of herbicides in Vietnam.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 151, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam 1 Dec 70. Secret. Sent for information. According to an attached NSC correspondence profile, Kissinger received the memorandum on December 24 and returned it on December 28, having discussed it with the President.

² Attached but not printed is Tab F, a November 20 memorandum from David to Kissinger.

³ Attached but not printed is Tab C, a December 22 memorandum from Laird to Nixon. Kissinger originally requested Laird's and the JCS's opinion of David's proposal in a memorandum, December 10, which is also attached but not printed.

—These steps have been taken so that there will be strict conformance in Vietnam with the policies governing the use of herbicides in the US.⁴

—Should the military situation change as a result of an increase in the enemy level of activity, we would need to reassess this policy.

—The ban on the herbicide known as Orange remains in effect. (You will recall that Mr. Packard temporarily banned the use of Orange in April of 1970, in conjunction with a selective ban on its use in the US, after scientific experiments established that a major component (2,4,5-T) of Orange caused fetal abnormalities in certain experimental animals.)

Secretary Laird also reports the decision and action of General Abrams and Ambassador Bunker (Tab D)⁵ to phase out *both* the crop destruction and defoliation programs when stocks on hand are consumed. Current stocks will support base perimeter defoliation and crop destruction operations until about May of 1971.

General Abrams and Ambassador Bunker intended no announcement of their decision to phase out these programs in order to preserve the option to reinstitute them if necessary in the future.

However, the essence of the Abrams-Bunker decision has already begun to leak in the field, though some reports are distorted. Furthermore, we will have to defend our herbicide policy and operations during the Senate hearings on the Geneva Protocol shortly after Congress reconvenes in January.

Also, Dr. David has recommended (Tab E)⁶ that a release announcing our position be issued very soon to make us less vulnerable to the criticism which will appear in the Herbicide Assessment Commission's report to the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science around December 27. Dr. David noted earlier (Tab F) that this criticism would have some basis in fact.

In light of Secretary Laird's report to you and the decision of General Abrams and Ambassador Bunker to phase out all herbicide programs, I agree with Dr. David that we should attempt to establish more reasonable and "salable" policy guidelines.

⁴ According to a December 24 covering memorandum by Guhin, there was an inconsistency in this point, because the military intended to continue using herbicides to destroy crops in Vietnam even though they were not registered for such use in the United States. Nutter informed Laird of this in a December 22 memorandum, but noted that some deviations from domestic practices were inescapable due to differences in vegetation. (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330-76-67, Viet 370.64 1970)

⁵ Attached but not printed is Tab D, a retyped copy of joint Embassy/MACV telegram 19374, undated.

⁶ Attached but not printed is Tab E, a note from David to Kissinger, December 18, with a draft press release dated December 17.

I therefore recommend an announcement (Tab B)⁷ setting forth our position in the manner reported by Secretary Laird. This announcement is cast in the format of a report to you by the Secretary.

I also recommend that you approve a memorandum for Secretary Laird (Tab A)⁸ thanking him for his report to you on this matter and directing that any major changes or expansion of the current program be submitted for your approval.

Recommendation:

That you approve the memorandum for Secretary Laird (Tab A) and the proposed public release (Tab B) on our herbicide policy as reported by Secretary Laird.⁹

⁷ Not attached. On December 26, the White House announced the decision on herbicide use in Vietnam. (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, p. 1198)

⁸ Attached but not printed is Tab A, a December 28 memorandum from Kissinger to Laird in which he noted that the President thanked him for his December 22 report, acknowledged that the phase-out program had begun, and directed that any extension or any expansion of the current program and plans regarding Vietnamization of chemical herbicide capabilities be submitted for presidential approval.

⁹ Kissinger initialed the Approve option for Nixon.

98. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker)¹

Washington, December 23, 1970.

General Haig mentioned the matter of the desirability of Sir Robert Thompson returning to Vietnam to make a study of the police problem early next year. Bill Colby also told Dick Smyser last week in Saigon that he and Prime Minister Kiem favored the project. However, I assume that you will want to check with Thieu before we contact Sir Robert. If not please let me know. My concern is that if Thieu is not really behind police improvement there would be no value in going ahead with Thompson's project. We are not wedded to Thompson proj-

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 3, Chronological File. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The message is the copy as submitted for transmission. According to a note on a December 23 covering memorandum from Haig to Kissinger, it was dispatched at 4 p.m.

ect and will be responsive to your wishes. I will await word from you before proceeding.

We have reviewed NSC team's findings with the President and discussed the military campaign which General Haig mentioned to you. I am confident that the President will approve the program largely along the lines Haig outlined.

Secretary Laird has now been apprised of the President's wishes with respect to both the Cambodian and the post-Tet phases of this plan.² The President has decided to inform no one else during this planning phase until Secretary Laird and Admiral Moorer return from Southeast Asia. General Abrams will be given authority to proceed with the Cambodian phase of the campaign sometime today³ and Secretary Laird and Admiral Moorer have been instructed to consult further on the post-Tet phase during their visit.

The President told Secretary Laird and Admiral Moorer that they were to approach this portion of the campaign positively, with the view toward its full implementation. The President has asked Secretary Laird to avoid using U.S. airlift for purely ARVN troop lift if at all possible and to justify U.S. airlift in terms of logistic support.

General Haig has apprised us of President Thieu's concerns with respect to U.S. support for the military campaign and his concerns about troop levels. As of this writing, the President is inclined to withhold decision on our troop levels for the period following July 1 until we have had an opportunity to appraise at least the early phase of the military campaign. Haig also informed me of Thieu's position on the political initiative and I anticipate that you will keep us informed via this channel of Thieu's thinking as it crystallizes.⁴

² See Document 96.

³ Moorer authorized the Chup Plantation operation in message JCS 16892 to McCain and Abrams, December 24. He instructed them to continue coordination and planning with FANK and GVN and informed them that, pending final U.S. concurrence, the United States would provide B-52 TACAIR support, fighter bombers, fixed wing or helicopter gunships, and troop and MEDEVAC airlift that was beyond the capacity of the VNAF. A copy of the message was attached as Tab G to a paper entitled, "Topics for Discussion," December 28, which indicated that the coordination and planning for the operation had been approved. (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330-76-76, Box 4, 337 WH)

⁴ In his December 21 diary entry, Haldeman wrote that Nixon informed Kissinger that he was considering traveling to Vietnam in April to "build up Thieu" and then make a "basic end of the war announcement." Kissinger argued against committing to a total withdrawal in 1971, because "trouble can start mounting in '72 that we won't be able to deal with, and which we'll have to answer for at the elections." He recommended withdrawing by the end of 1972 "so we won't have to deliver finally until after the elections." Haldeman noted that Nixon seemed to agree, but still believed he would need to do something significant in early 1971. (*The Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*)

General Haig was most complimentary of the courtesies extended by you and your embassy personnel during the visit of our team to Saigon last week.

Warm personal regards.

99. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, December 28, 1970.

SUBJECT

Ambassador Bunker's Report on The Situation in Vietnam

Ambassador Bunker's most recent periodic report on Vietnam is attached at Tab A.² A summary of its more important points follows.

Improvement in the economic situation. The economic reform program put into effect in early October has been remarkably successful.

—Trends in prices, bank deposits, and import licensing indicate that a considerable amount of confidence has been restored, and the prospect of an excellent rice harvest during the next two months reinforces the generally favorable short term outlook.

—But inflationary problems could begin to build again by next summer, when the effects of increased benefits for disabled veterans, payments to landlords under the land reform program, and another government wage increase will be felt.

—We and the South Vietnamese Government are already reviewing ways to counter these longer term problems, and we believe that they should be manageable.

Thieu moves on peace proposals. President Thieu moved quickly to endorse your peace proposal of October 7.³

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 151, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam 1 Dec 70. Secret; Nodis. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen." Haig signed it for Kissinger.

² Attached but not printed is telegram 20010 from Saigon, October 3. The text is printed in full in *The Bunker Papers, Reports to the President From Vietnam, 1967–1973*, Vol. 3, pp. 796–805.

³ See Document 46.

—It evoked a remarkably widespread and favorable response in South Vietnam, similar to the reaction in the U.S. and elsewhere.

—The feared side effects of a let-down in the ARVN did not materialize, and observers here agree that the initiative placed the enemy at a further psychological disadvantage.

—Recent public attitude surveys clearly reveal that Vietnamese view the continuation of the war as the major national problem, and this issue will undoubtedly receive special attention in the coming months before the elections.

—We are discussing with President Thieu ways to spell out his proposal for elections in more forthcoming and specific terms. Any such restatement would be well received both in South Vietnam and in world opinion, and would be taken as a sign of confidence and strength.

Political trends. The elections next year and a growing awareness of the increasingly important political nature of the contest with the Communists are combining to focus attention on politics in South Vietnam.

—The enemy is attempting to take advantage of what he calls the contradictions of Vietnamese society by penetrating local protest groups and increasing divisive pressures.

—The potential also exists for a strong non-Communist opposition movement in view of continuing corruption and inequalities, especially in urban areas.

—Thieu, as President and a candidate for re-election, occupies a key position in relation to both Communist and non-Communist political opposition. He is already acting on a number of fronts to improve his political position vis-à-vis the Communists and his non-Communist critics.

—Duong Van “Big” Minh, the popular ex-general, could present a major challenge to Thieu’s re-election.⁴ It is not yet clear, however, whether Minh can organize disparate opposition groups; indeed, the relative organizational abilities of the two men could be a vital factor in the outcome of the election.⁵

⁴ In a memorandum to Kissinger, December 22, Holdridge noted that Minh commented to an American observer that he was confident about being elected and desired to unite the people. Minh expected good support from northern and central South Vietnam and parts of the south including Saigon, southern Catholics, the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai religious sects, and mid-level Army officers. He hoped to build a broad coalition that would include moderate members of Thieu’s group and non-Communist members of the NLF. He felt that the people did not trust Thieu because he was “devious” and “lacked sincerity.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 151, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, 1 Dec 70)

⁵ The President wrote the following in the margin: “Bunker should explore immediately with Thieu the possibility of his enveloping Big Minh by giving him a title in a ‘coalition’ (non-Communist) slate.”

Pacification and Land Reform. While enemy military activity continues at a low level, pacification is moving ahead.

—The situation in southern South Vietnam is particularly encouraging. The five northernmost provinces are also doing well, despite a continuing enemy main force threat.

—There are soft spots, however, in the central coastal region of MR II, where Communist terrorist campaigns have had a real impact. The new regional commander there is a great improvement over his predecessor, but he faces many problems.

—The land reform program is gaining momentum. Land titles distributed to tenant farmers jumped from 5,000 in October to 15,000 in November. In the future, the government plans to distribute about 30,000 titles per month, and has also begun to make compensatory payments to landlords.

100. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, January 8, 1971, 1335Z.

307. Subject: American equities in the 1971 GVN Presidential and lower house elections.

1. The South Vietnamese legislature is now in the process of considering the election laws which will regulate the 1971 Presidential and lower house elections. The Presidential election will be held on 3 October 1971, and our current information indicates that the lower house elections will take place on 29 August 1971. The U.S. Mission has reported and will continue to report in detail on the preparations for these elections by the various political forces and groupings in South Viet-Nam, and on developments in the electoral campaigns as they progress. I believe it appropriate, therefore, and it is the purpose of this message, to take a broader look at what the U.S. role and objectives should be in these elections in order that we might focus on this vital matter in a timely manner.

2. President Thieu has clearly decided that he wishes to be re-elected and is already actively working toward that goal. He believes

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 14 VIET S. Secret; Nodis; Cherokee.

that his principal support will come from military personnel and from civil servants in all levels of the GVN governmental structure—from province chiefs; members of provincial, village and hamlet councils; and from administrative cadres throughout the national and local governments. In addition, Thieu expects to receive support from other organized political forces like the Catholics, the Montagnards, the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Quoc Tu Buddhists and that segment of organized labor which is responsive to the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor. Thieu favors the development of political parties in SVN, but realistically in my opinion, does not believe any of the parties is strong enough to play a major role in 1971. Therefore, he will not place much of his reliance on political parties in next year's campaign; he will devote most of his efforts (1) to strengthening his position in the military and civil apparatus of the government, and (2) to inducing that apparatus to work actively on his behalf among other elements of the population. At this point in time, and assuming that Thieu continues to follow the electoral strategy just outlined, he is the front runner in the Presidential election. But he is far from certain of victory, and much could happen over the next 10 months either to diminish or enhance his prospects.

3. In my opinion, it is basic to U.S. interests in South Viet-Nam that the 1971 elections should contribute to a lasting period of governmental stability which will allow the Vietnamization program to be successful. If Vietnamization is not successful, American policy in Viet-Nam will have failed. Without governmental stability for the next several years, it is likely that Vietnamization will fail.

4. While it may be incorrect to believe that only Thieu can provide the necessary degree of stability in SVN for the near future, it is apparent to me that neither of the other candidates who are presently significant contenders for the Presidency—General "Big" Minh or Vice President Ky—would serve U.S. interests as well as Thieu. Given Ky's reputation in the U.S., his election would make it more difficult than it now is for the U.S. administration to continue an effective policy in Viet-Nam. There is, I believe, a good chance that Ky will not push his candidacy, for he has much less voter support than either Thieu or Minh and cannot hope to win. His role, if he runs, would essentially be a spoiling operation against Thieu. On balance we think he will prefer to see Thieu elected over Minh, and it is likely he will work out some arrangement with Thieu on the 1971 elections. General Minh, despite his alleged popularity in South Viet-Nam, has shown that he is a poor administrator and that he is unwilling to devote the time and effort to the job which is necessary for even reasonably efficient government. Minh sees himself as the peace candidate and as such thinks he will be able to arrive at a settlement with North Viet-Nam and the VC. Both Minh's eagerness to win the election and to end the war by

a negotiated settlement, and his naivete and his known weaknesses as an administrator and leader, are viewed with profound concern by a large segment of the military, the police and important civilian elements. If Minh were to win, excessive compromises with the Communists or weak and ineffective government would almost certainly set the stage for a military coup. Minh's election, in short, holds out the promise of subsequent serious and dangerous instability.

5. I have, therefore, concluded that a principal objective of United States policy in Viet-Nam over the next 10 months should be the reelection of President Thieu, and the election to the lower house of deputies who would support both Thieu's own election efforts and Thieu's policies. I believe the measures which we should employ to accomplish this objective should be the following:

A. We should not publicly or officially intervene in the South Vietnamese electoral process in any way. We should scrupulously avoid providing open encouragement to any candidate over any other candidate.

B. We should devote maximum efforts to making all phases of the Vietnamization and pacification programs of the GVN more effective; to encouraging a more rapid implementation of the GVN's land reform program; and to assuring that the GVN's economy stays on an even keel during 1971. Efforts in these areas are worthy, necessary and in the U.S. interest in their own right. They can also contribute markedly to Thieu's electoral chances.

C. We should covertly take certain actions which will strengthen the electoral prospects of Thieu and of lower house candidates who will support Thieu. The precise actions to be taken require further careful study, but we should be prepared to accept the fact that some covert actions in support of Thieu will be necessary. We should also consider whether there are any covert actions which should be undertaken to prepare for the contingency of a Thieu defeat. Such actions, taken now, might provide us greater influence than we would otherwise have over the initial actions of a successor government.

6. The information contained in this message should be confined to: Secretary Rogers, Dr. Henry Kissinger, Assistant Secretary Green and Ambassador William Sullivan.

Bunker

101. Editorial Note

On January 9, 1971, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Henry A. Kissinger met with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin to discuss, among other things, the situation in Southeast Asia, its impact on U.S.-Soviet relations, and the possibility of the Soviets acting as an intermediary to restart the U.S.-North Vietnamese negotiations. Kissinger asked Dobrynin whether the Soviet Union would be willing to take a more active role in the negotiations. The memorandum of conversation reads in part:

“We then turned to Vietnam. I said to Dobrynin that we had read Kosygin’s interview with the Japanese newspaper with great interest. We had noticed that Kosygin had listed the usual unacceptable Hanoi demands, but he had also indicated a Soviet willingness to engage itself in the process of a settlement. This was stated, it seemed to me, more emphatically than had been said in the past. Was I correct?

“Dobrynin merely said that he noticed that sentence also. I asked whether the two statements were linked; in other words, whether the Soviet willingness to engage itself was linked to our prior acceptance of Hanoi’s demands. Dobrynin then said he wanted to ask me a hypothetical question. If Hanoi dropped its demands for a coalition government, would we be prepared to discuss withdrawal separately. I said as long as the matter was hypothetical, it was very hard to form a judgment, but I could imagine that the issue of withdrawals was a lot easier to deal with than the future composition of a government in South Vietnam. Indeed, if he remembered an article I had written in 1968, I had proposed exactly this procedure. Dobrynin asked whether I still believed that this was a possible approach. I said it certainly was a possible approach and, indeed, I had been of the view that it would be the one that would speed up matters. Dobrynin said he would report this to Moscow.”

Kissinger forwarded a copy of the January 9 memorandum of conversation to the President under a covering memorandum on January 25. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 490, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin–Kissinger, 1970, Vol. 4 (Part 2)) The memorandum of conversation is printed in full in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIII, Soviet Union, October 1970–October 1971, Document 90.

Kosygin’s interview was with the Japanese newspaper, *Asahi Shimbun*, on January 2, 1971. *The Washington Post* reported that during the interview: “Kosygin warned that the United States would ‘achieve nothing in Vietnam by acting from positions of strength,’ and said, ‘there can be no doubt that neither the ‘expansion of American aggression in Indochina nor a Vietnamization of the war will bring the United States victory.’ “ Later, according to the *Post*, Kosygin made the

following offer: “The Soviet Union is ready, on its part, to further facilitate the attainment of a political settlement in Indochina which, of course, should meet the lawful interests and aspirations of the peoples of that area.” (*The Washington Post*, January 3, 1971, p. A 1) Kissinger’s article, “The Vietnam Negotiations,” was published in January 1969 in *Foreign Affairs* (Volume 47, No. 2, pages 211–234).

On January 23, Dobrynin and Kissinger returned to their discussion of Vietnam. Kissinger described the exchange as follows:

“Dobrynin then turned to Vietnam briefly. He said he wanted me to know that the general observations about the possibility of separating military and political issues had been transmitted to Hanoi without comment and without recommendation, but they had been transmitted. It had occurred only a few days ago, however, and no answer had as yet been received. I said that I hoped he understood that the President was deadly serious when he said that we would protect our interests in Vietnam and that we would handle those matters separately. He responded that Soviet leaders understood this up to a certain point, but beyond that the Soviet leaders would have to react whether they liked it or not. I said I understood that if we landed troops in Haiphong the Soviet Union would have to protest. He responded that we could be sure they would have to protest. I said that they could be sure that we were not going to land U.S. troops in Haiphong. Dobrynin smiled and said that he hoped that Indochina would not be an obstacle. He implied strongly that in its present framework it would not be.”

Kissinger sent a copy of the memorandum of conversation to the President under a covering memorandum on January 27 in which he provided his summary of the key points. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 490, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin–Kissinger, 1970, Vol. 4 (Part 2)) The memorandum of conversation is printed in full in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIII, Soviet Union, October 1970–October 1971, Document 103.

102. Paper Prepared by the National Security Council Staff¹

Washington, undated.

ANALYTICAL SUMMARY

Brief analytical summaries of the five NSSM 99² papers follow.

A. Friendly Strategy Alternatives³

Introduction—Four strategic thrusts are presented with associated military and political courses of action and variants. These strategies are still at the conceptual stage, but clear differences are discernible and the issues emerge. The main deficiency is that the political alternatives provided by State are so vague as to be meaningless. There is also an interests section in this paper which Under Secretary Irwin may use to remind you of the “costs” to U.S. interests for the various strategies and the risks associated with involving the Thai in Indo-China.

The Strategies

Strategy 1—This is a military strategy that seeks to defeat Hanoi’s forces outside North Vietnam. The specific action contemplated is an overt pincer movement in South Laos using Thai and South Vietnamese forces to cut off the flow of men and supplies into Cambodia and South Vietnam. A political variant to this strategy calls for a formal alliance among the non-communist Indo-Chinese states.

Strategy 2—This is primarily a military strategy with some possible political variants (which are not yet adequately developed). The military strategy is to build up indigenous capabilities to frustrate the enemy’s military hopes over the long term. Two military variants are proposed:

—(A). A force diversion strategy relying on Thai, Lao, and Cambodian forces to occupy Hanoi’s forces on every front to the fullest extent possible. This could encompass Thai overt or covert forces in South

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-51, SRG Meetings, SEA Strategy (NSSM 99 Pt. II), 1-15-71 AM (1 of 2). Top Secret. K. Wayne Smith forwarded the paper to Kissinger under a January 13 covering memorandum.

² For NSSM 99, see Document 25.

³ This section summarizes the Interests and Strategic Thrusts section of the response to NSSM 99, Part II, November 25. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-51, SRG Meetings, SEA Strategy (NSSM 99 Pt. II), 1-15-71 AM (2 of 2))

Laos, expanded Laotian operations in North Laos, Cambodian offensives in northern Cambodia, etc.

—(B). A defense in depth strategy relying on RF–PF forces with a maneuver force shield in South Vietnam and a strong territorial defense in Cambodia to make enemy attacks on population concentrations so prohibitive as to force the enemy to recognize that the manpower costs of achieving his ultimate objectives by military means are prohibitive. This strategy would not employ Thai forces in Indo-China except in a limited covert role nor would it call for offensives by Cambodian or Laotian forces. Only vital enclaves would be defended in Laos and Cambodia. Air interdiction would be relied on in South Laos.

The political variants to strategy 2 are platitudes (see p. 22, for example). We were unable to persuade State to develop interesting political variants. I understand Under Secretary Irwin has acknowledged this serious shortcoming of the strategies paper. For example, what internal political initiatives could the GVN take to undermine the VC politically or promote an accommodation? With regard to China, what could be done to develop a basis for eventual Chinese acceptance of a settlement in Indo-China?

Would we be willing to remove our bases in exchange for a settlement? The whole question of SEATO and Rusk–Thanat⁴ should be assessed because Thai involvement is called for by the high variant of this strategy. Could we modify our interpretation of the Treaty to involve our ground forces only against a Chinese attack and employ the Nixon Doctrine with assurances to the Thai of our support against threats from Hanoi?

Strategy 3—This is primarily a political strategy which seeks to establish a mutual accommodation. This is done by de-escalation of the war by our side on the assumption that “at least the minimal interests of those states involved in Southeast Asia can be reconciled.”

This odd concoction assumes Hanoi wants a settlement. But this won't do. It might be somewhat plausible if the strategy set out political conditions Hanoi might accept, but the political actions contemplated are so vaguely developed (see pp. 29–30) that there is no basis for saying Hanoi might be lured into a settlement.

More fundamental is why a diminution in the level of violence would be an incentive for Hanoi to settle. If plausible political actions

⁴ The March 6, 1962, Rusk–Thanat communiqué on U.S. defense of Thailand is printed in *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1962*, pp. 1091–1092.

were developed these would make more sense as political variants to the military actions of Strategy 2 which have some clout.

Strategy 4—This is a throw away strategy that calls for immediate and complete U.S. withdrawals. It is put forward as a contingency strategy in the event that a peace government comes to power in Saigon, but the real reason for its inclusion is that State wanted a lower strategy than Strategy 3 which it favors.

[Omitted here are Kissinger's talking points on the issue for the January 15 Senior Review Group meeting.]

B. The MR Studies⁵

Introduction—These (and the program budget) are the basic analytical accomplishments of the study thus far. For the first time we have a quantitative grasp on the main force war. Unfortunately the summary does not do justice to the four MR studies. Below I attempt to bring the countrywide results into focus by a table that projects the friendly force situation into 1972 assuming there are 14 maneuver battalions still in South Vietnam (the current Fiscal Guidance assumption).

TABLE

FRIENDLY BATTALION SURPLUSES AND DEFICITS IN 1972 BY MR UNDER ALTERNATIVE CAMBODIA-LAOS OUTCOME ASSUMPTIONS (Friendly Battalions Required to Maintain a Main Force Stalemate)

	Case A (South Laos)	Case B (Force Diversion)	Case C (Defense in Depth)
MR 1	-15	-15	-20
MR 2	-11	-11	-15
MR 3	+11	+ 5	0
MR 4	+26	+13	0
Countrywide Surplus (+) or Deficit (-)	+11	-8	-35

⁵ This section summarizes the undated paper that analyzes each Military Region in South Vietnam. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-51, SRG Meetings, SEA Strategy (NSSM 99 Pt. II), 1-15-71 AM (2 of 2))

The table considers three cases:

—Case A: a very favorable outcome in Cambodia and South Laos similar to that which result *if* Thai and South Vietnamese forces backed by U.S. support were to successfully mount an offensive to cut off the flow of enemy resources through South Laos.

—Case B: an indecisive outcome in Cambodia and South Laos that might approximate the evolution of our current force diversion strategy. Thai, Cambodian, and Laotian forces would secure important areas in Laos and Cambodia and harass enemy activities on the trail.

—Case C: the outcome we can expect if the Cambodian and Laotian governments are all but defeated and the enemy's diverted forces return en masse to South Vietnam.

*Footnotes to Table on preceding page:*⁶

Assumptions:

MR 1: All cases assume a 1972 dry season NVA offensive in MR 1 after a one division NVA reinforcement.

MR 2: All cases assume the enemy will mount a highlands offensive in MR 2 during the 1972 season, redeploying the 3 regiments now diverted to South Laos to MR 2 for this purpose. They also assume RVNAF performance increases of 25% and that ARVN reinforcements (from MRs 3 and 4 for cases A and B) are 100% more effective than current MR 2 units.

MR 3: Case A assumes friendly side success in Cambodia forces Hanoi to maintain present diversions. ARVN performance continues to improve.

Case B assumes an indecisive outcome in Cambodia that allows the enemy to free up a division presently diverted there for redeployment back in to MR 3. The presumption is that this division is now occupied in restoring disrupted supply lines and can be freed later. However, no concerted main force attack is assumed in MR 3.

Case C assumes a disadvantageous outcome in Cambodia such that the enemy redeploys all his diverted forces back into MR 3 and halts pacification progress in the Delta. RVNAF performance continues to gain.

MR 4: Case A assumes the Cambodian outcome continues to be favorable to the GVN causing the enemy to be unable to halt GVN pacification in MR 4. One ARVN division would be freed from MR 4 in 1971 and another in 1972.

⁶ There are no footnotes marked on the table in the original.

Case B assumes an indecisive outcome in Cambodia such that the enemy is able to prevent his total defeat in MR 4 by 1972. This would mean that one ARVN division could be freed from MR 4 in 1972.

Case C assumes a disadvantageous outcome in Cambodia such that the enemy redeploys all his diverted forces back into MR 4 and halts pacification progress in the Delta.

Table 1 shows the main force outcome in 1972 for each strategy case: Case A a surplus of 11 battalions; Case B a deficit of 8 battalions; and Case C a deficit of 35 battalions.

These results assume continued improvements in ARVN and RF-PF performance at current rates. If performance gains were accelerated the outcomes would improve markedly.

The enemy's options turn on how well he does in Cambodia and Laos. If he restores his access to MR's 3 and 4 without a requirement for continued force diversions, i.e. forces Lon Nol into an enclave this dry season, then we can expect no surpluses from MR's 3 and 4 for deployment to MRs 1 and 2. If, however, the outcome is indecisive in Cambodia, allowing the enemy to free only a portion of his diverted forces, roughly two ARVN divisions can be freed from MR's 3 and 4. Success in Cambodia would place ARVN in a very strong position to divert forces to MR's 1 and 2 to replace departed U.S. units.

[Omitted here are Kissinger's talking points on the issue for the January 15 SRG meeting.]

C. 1971 Enemy Strategy Alternatives⁷

Introduction—This analysis is the first product of a concerted effort on our part to get CIA to systematically analyze the enemy's strategy alternatives in terms of manpower (infiltration), unit deployment, and logistic considerations.

Major Findings—The war has cost Hanoi heavily in manpower. Over the last decade roughly 800,000 have been lost causing the able-bodied manpower pool to shrink by 600,000 from 1.8 to 1.2 million, whereas otherwise it would have increased by 200,000. Even though 150,000 enter this pool every year, manpower considerations seem to have played an important role in Hanoi's choice of a protracted war strategy.

Hanoi has cut its losses as far as it can hope to with its protracted war strategy. Nearly 100,000 will have to be infiltrated in 1971, compared with 60,000 in 1970, to maintain a credible protracted war posture. Otherwise enemy force strength will decline. Enemy KIA per at-

⁷ This section summarizes the Enemy Capabilities and Strategies section of the NSSM 99 Part II study, November 25. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box SCI-23, National Security Council, 1969–1975, Committees and Panels, Senior Review Group, 1970–1972)

tack, which fell sharply in 1969–70 over 1967–68, has reached an apparent floor. Most important, the enemy is not mounting attacks with sufficient frequency or intensity to turn back pacification.

The enemy strategy study's conclusions on alternative strategies in 1971 are summarized in the following chart.

[Omitted here are a chart entitled, "Hypothetical Enemy Strategies in Indochina for FY 1971; Section D, a summary of the Program Budget of the projected total cost for U.S. and RVN forces for FY 1971–1973; and Section E, a summary of an economic analysis of the South Vietnamese economy.]

103. Minutes of a Meeting of the Senior Review Group¹

Washington, January 15, 1971, 4:49–5:59 p.m.

SUBJECT

NSSM 99 (Southeast Asia Strategy) and NSSM 96 (Laos)²

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	JCS
State	Gen. Wm. C. Westmoreland
Under Secy. John N. Irwin	Brig. Gen. Foster Smith
Mr. U. Alexis Johnson	Brig. Gen. Adrian St. John
Mr. Arthur Hartman	AID
Mr. James R. Wilson	Mr. Maurice Williams
Defense	OMB
Mr. David Packard	Mr. James R. Schlesinger
Mr. Armistead I. Selden	NSC Staff
Rear Adm. Wm. R. Flanagan	Col. Richard T. Kennedy
CIA	Dr. K. Wayne Smith
Mr. Richard Helms	Capt. Robert Sansom
Mr. George Carver	Mr. John H. Holdridge
	Mr. D. Keith Guthrie

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-112, SRG Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. All brackets are in the original.

² For NSSM 99, see Document 25. For NSSM 96, see Document 3. The response to NSSM 96, August 6, 1970, is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-51, SRG Meeting, Laos, 1–15–71. An analytical study of the paper, prepared by the NSC staff, December 4, 1970, is *ibid.*

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. *MR Studies.*³ The VSSG Working Group will prepare a study of alternatives for remedying the force deficits in Vietnam anticipated in 1972. As a basis for its study, the Working Group should obtain recommendations from the Department of Defense. Among the measures to be analyzed are (1) creation of new units by splitting existing ARVN divisions, (2) deployment of a Korean division in MR 1, and (3) transfer of ARVN units from surplus to deficit MRs.

The VSSG Working Group will also extend its analysis of force deficits by military region through 1973.

2. *Training for Cambodian Forces.* On the basis of consultations with MACV, the Defense Department will prepare recommendations on measures to improve professional capabilities in the Cambodian armed forces. In this connection, the feasibility of employing Vietnamese units as demonstrators through joint Cambodian-Vietnamese operations should be investigated.

3. *Enemy Strategy Study.*⁴ The CIA will extend its analysis of possible enemy strategies through 1972.

4. *Strengthening Thai Forces.* The SRG agreed that it is essential to push forward rapidly with programs to build up Thai forces in order to meet the President's desire to keep open the option of employing Thai troops if required to prevent a collapse in Cambodia in 1972. It was understood that for legal reasons, US assistance to the Thai Armed Forces might have to be justified on the basis of providing for the defense of Thailand.

The SRG also agreed that further study is required of conditions under which Thai troops might be employed in Cambodia and of the long-term US-Thai defense relationship after the end of the war in Indochina.

5. *Strategic Thrusts Study.*⁵ The State Department will revise the Strategic Thrusts Study with a view to defining more specifically actions to be taken to implement the diplomatic and political elements of the various strategies.

6. *Laos.* The SRG approved a State Department proposal to solicit Ambassador Godley's views on the desirability of approaching Souvanna to suggest an initiative on limitation of air activities in North Laos as a means of facilitating progress in the talks between the RLG and the Lao Patriotic Front.

³ For a summary, see Document 102.

⁴ For a summary, see Document 102.

⁵ For a summary, see Document 102.

Dr. Kissinger: I suggest we take the factual part of the study first. We want to see whether we all agree with the analysis of where we stand in the various military regions. We can then use this as a point of departure for discussing the strategies.

As I remember, this is about as far as we got in discussing this study previously.⁶

Mr. Packard: We will get all the way through this time.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Gen. Westmoreland) Would you like to comment on the factual basis as set forth in the MR studies and tell us how you see the situation developing in the next year or two?

Gen. Westmoreland: I think the analysis is valid although the methodology is terribly oversimplified. Nevertheless, the conclusions are correct: that there will be a deficiency in military strength in MRs 1 and 2 and that there could be a surplus in MRs 3 and 4. There are, of course, a lot of factors that have to be considered other than the number of battalions. You have to take into account the requirements for fighting in Cambodia, the quality of command in the various regions, and the ability to maintain the strength of the various units. If you are thinking in terms of moving battalions and divisions around like checkers, you have to remember that when a Vietnamese unit is transferred to another area some distance away, it will suffer massive desertions, amounting to as much as 50% of its strength. Alex Johnson will remember when we moved the 25th Division to Quang Ngai province in 1964 and wound up with a corporal's guard. It took two years to build up that division again. In addition, the 25th Division, which spoke a different dialect, antagonized the local populace.

Dr. Kissinger: How do the North Vietnamese lick this problem?

Gen. Westmoreland: They speak a decidedly different dialect.

Dr. Kissinger: In other words they are foreigners any place they go.

Gen. Westmoreland: Yes.

Mr. Packard: Isn't it true that some of the things that inhibit movement of Vietnamese units have changed since 1964?

⁶ Kissinger is referring to the discussion of the NSSM 99 (Part II) Southeast Asia Strategy study at the December 14, 1970, SRG meeting. At the outset of the meeting, Packard, the JCS representatives, and Irwin objected that MACV did not have an opportunity to give its input into the study, so Kissinger adjourned the meeting after 16 minutes, noting that it would be rescheduled after MACV contributed. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-111, SRG Minutes, Originals, 1970) K. Wayne Smith, in a December 16 memorandum to Kissinger, described the meeting as a "fiasco," noting that Irwin's chief concern was that Kissinger was directing the discussion to quantitative issues at the expense of important non-quantitative ones. (Ibid., Box H-50, SRG Meetings, Laos NSSM 99, 12-14-70)

Gen. Westmoreland: Yes, but we still can't move them around like our troops.

Dr. Kissinger: Where does this leave us?

Gen. Westmoreland: One way of taking care of the projected deficiency in MRs 1 and 2 would be to split the Vietnamese 1st Division in two and create new divisions from each half. Also the 57th Regiment at Da Nang might be expanded to division strength. Of course, whether you can expand Vietnamese forces generally is debatable. Considering the economic and manpower base, I have some doubts about this. What we have to do is build up the units in the Delta and create new forces in MR 1. If we wanted to pay the price (which would probably be a big one), we could get a Korean division deployed along the DMZ.

Mr. Johnson: Would there be a price?

Gen. Westmoreland: Yes. Korean inertia is great. It would cost us perhaps \$100 million. They would demand all sorts of things.

Dr. Kissinger: Like what?

Gen. Westmoreland: Additional equipment, tanks, APCs, an accelerated modernization program for the ROK forces in Korea. It could be done, however, and I think it would be worth the price.

Mr. Packard: There is some talk that the Koreans are not doing well where they are. Why is this?

Gen. Westmoreland: The Vietnamese are not happy to have them in populated areas. They are sometimes ruthless in dealing with the populace. But they are good troops and well disciplined. If deployed in unpopulated areas such as the region south of the DMZ, they could help. They are not particularly good offensive troops but are good on defense. They would be doing the same thing at the DMZ that they do on the 38th parallel.

What this all boils down to is that there is going to be a deficiency in strength in MRs 1 and 2. The point of the exercise is to find means to provide the necessary forces.

Mr. Packard: Although there is excess capability in MRs 3 and 4, it may be just as well to leave existing forces there, since that area is the population and economic center of the country and it might be well to have a little more margin of security there.

Dr. Kissinger: If we spread ourselves too thin, we might lose everything.

Mr. Irwin: What degree of troop use in Cambodia are we anticipating?

Mr. Packard: That is another important problem.

Mr. Irwin: It would be good to have a margin of safety to take care of that too.

Gen. Westmoreland: There is always going to be a surplus of forces in the Saigon region. The Vietnamese will never move troops away from the capital as long as a threat exists.

Dr. Kissinger: If we don't do anything more than we are doing right now, the situation will be as described in the MR studies. All of the measures we have talked about—building up new divisions, moving the Koreans—are not in the present program. We need suggestions on how to implement these measures.

Gen. Westmoreland: Making up the deficiencies involves raising the military ceiling deploying units subject to the risks I have discussed, or revamping the Vietnamese military structure on a trade-off basis.

Mr. Johnson: I have never heard the Korean proposal before. I don't think it should be dismissed.

Gen. Westmoreland: It was discussed when I came back from Vietnam in July.

Mr. Irwin: Where is the Korean unit now?

Gen. Westmoreland: In the coastal region of MR 2 around Nha Trang.

Dr. Kissinger: We will have a major force deficit even if things go favorably in Laos and other places.

Gen. Westmoreland: I presume we are assuming that the North Vietnamese will violate the DMZ.

Capt. Sansom: The study assumes a small-scale (one division) offense in 1972 but not a 1965-type offensive.

Dr. Kissinger: I imagine that splitting the First Division in two would be about a one-year program.

Gen. Westmoreland: It would take about nine months. We have to start now.

Dr. Kissinger: Yes, or the forces won't be ready for the threat that might develop during the dry season next year. It would be easier to move existing units, except for the problems you mention.

Mr. Packard: There has been some talk about measures, such as housing, that might make it easier to move Vietnamese units. (to Gen. Westmoreland) Wouldn't that help?

Gen. Westmoreland: It might, but lead time and cost are involved with this also. There is also the requirement for dependents' housing. It took several years to remedy all the problems created by moving the 25th Division.

Dr. Kissinger: I remember about that. It was reputed to be a lousy division.

Gen. Westmoreland: It had been one of the best, and it now is again.

Dr. Kissinger: It is imperative we find out right away what is involved in making up these force deficits. (to Dr. Smith) Could we get the Working Group to look at various alternatives, based on recommendations from Defense, for remedying the military deficiency? The alternatives should include that of moving Vietnamese units, although I think that CINCPAC may have a point in warning about maintaining control of the key areas. I have always thought we would be better off with 100% control of 60% of the country, rather than with 60% control of 100% of the country. The Working Group could look into various schemes, such as moving the Korean division and splitting a South Vietnamese division.

Gen. Westmoreland: We might also be able to cut out portions of some units.

Dr. Kissinger: If we have the alternatives available, then we can assess the timing problem, that is, the lead times required for each measure. Do we need further discussion of the MR study? How about having a few words on the subject of enemy strategy alternatives? One interesting thing about this project is that the analysis of most of the questions halts in 1972. Some people plan to be around here after 1972. Where will we be in Vietnam in 1973?

Dr. Smith: The study of alternative enemy strategies is only for 1971.

Dr. Kissinger: One more thing on the MR studies. (to Sansom) Can we project these to 1973?

Capt. Sansom: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: Let's take up the enemy strategy paper. (to Helms) Dick, this is a very good study. Can somebody sum it up for us?

Mr. Helms: (to Carver) George.

(Mr. Packard left the meeting at this point.)

Mr. Carver: The paper argues that the enemy has certain manpower constraints which are going to inhibit his taking any large-scale action in the next few months, especially considering the additional duties which enemy troops have in South Laos and Cambodia. Hence, we don't look for too much of a radical change in the situation.

Dr. Kissinger: What is the enemy facing in Cambodia that he was not counting on?

Mr. Carver: He is having to use troops there that he had planned to use in Vietnam.

Dr. Kissinger: Is the same thing true in Laos?

Mr. Carver: There is the same problem of total dependence on the supply routes from the north. In addition, the enemy has to protect against serious ground incursions in this area. His behavior suggests

that he considers such probes a very real possibility. He senses a threat that didn't exist previously.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Gen. Westmoreland) What do you think?

Gen. Westmoreland: I agree with that analysis.

(Mr. Packard rejoined the meeting at this point.)

Dr. Kissinger: As I understand, the enemy will need to infiltrate 100,000 men this year in order to keep up the present level of activity. Is that about what the present rate is if figured on an annual basis?

Mr. Carver: If the present rate were sustained, annual infiltration would be about 100,000. However, as you know, the rate went way up in October and November and then dropped off in December.

Dr. Kissinger: If this rate is not sustained, then the enemy offensive capability will diminish.

Mr. Helms: If the annual rate falls below 100,000.

Dr. Kissinger: That means they can't mount a major offensive in Cambodia.

Mr. Carver: That depends on how you define major offensive. If you mean that the enemy can move against the Cambodians fully supported by the South Vietnamese, then he does not have the capability. But he can do such things as harass Routes 7 and 4.

Gen. Westmoreland: You are assuming that the enemy will continue to fight in Cambodia.

Mr. Carver: The tables in the study have an aura of precision that is perhaps misleading. There are many intangible factors that are difficult to evaluate and which would affect the enemy's disposition to fight. These include the degree of success in the military operations he does undertake, the political situation in South Vietnam, and the state of South Vietnamese morale.

Gen. Westmoreland: More important factors are logistics and ammunition resupply.

Dr. Kissinger: If there is no major push in Cambodia by June, can we assume that the rainy season will close down major operations for the balance of the year?

Mr. Carver: Probably. It depends partly on how much they are willing to risk by undertaking operations. If they can't mount an offensive in the dry season, the chances are not very good that they can do so in the wet season.

Mr. Packard: Also the Cambodians are continuing to improve.

Dr. Kissinger: That was going to be my next question. Are we assuming the Cambodians will still be around in June?

Gen. Westmoreland: June is too early a time to fix for the end of operations.

Dr. Kissinger: Then let's say July.

Gen. Westmoreland: It will not be until July that the roads will really be impassable.

Dr. Kissinger: Will the Cambodian army improve sufficiently to provide a significant additional obstacle to the enemy in 1972?

Mr. Packard: They can make a great improvement and still not be very good.

Gen. Westmoreland: We should do more to train leaders.

Mr. Johnson: Do we have any experience factor yet that would serve to evaluate the results with those Cambodians that have been trained in South Vietnam?

Gen. Westmoreland: No, they have not been back long enough for us to judge.

Mr. Packard: The Cambodians have a lot of shortcomings. They don't know how to lay out a defensive position. Their equipment is not right. Their machine guns don't work. Don't expect them to turn into first-class units in six months. Nevertheless, they have come along fast and will continue to improve.

Dr. Kissinger: Will they be able to offer appreciably more resistance?

Mr. Carver: They already can prevent the North Vietnamese from picking up victories on the cheap, especially when they are backed up by the South Vietnamese. The enemy would have to mount a major effort in order to make gains, and that would detract from his effort in Vietnam.

Mr. Helms: All of this discussion indicates to me that now is the time to go ahead on training for the Cambodians in Vietnam.

Mr. Johnson: We are doing it right now.

Dr. Kissinger: There is no longer any training being done in Thailand?

Gen. Westmoreland: Some is being done there. Another technique that might be useful is one which we applied in South Vietnam with the ARVN. This was to commit US troops in an effort to demonstrate leadership by example. The Vietnamese could do the same for the Cambodians.

Dr. Kissinger: It would give the Cambodians an incentive to get the hell out.

Gen. Westmoreland: It's true there have been some problems with the South Vietnamese troops in Cambodia, especially when they get to looting and raping. But perhaps it would be possible to move individual battalions in for five-day operations; for example, flying one in to help defend a beleaguered town. They could lead by example.

Mr. Packard: Isn't that what is going to happen with the current operation on Route 4?⁷

Gen. Westmoreland: That is a sizable operation, much larger than what I was thinking of. However, it will provide some of the same benefits. It would be possible to bring the Vietnamese battalions in to operate for about five days even if the Cambodians being helped were not under pressure. The Vietnamese would give the Cambodians a pattern of professionalism higher than their [the Cambodians'] own.

Dr. Kissinger: How would you go about getting this done?

Gen. Westmoreland: You would have to sell it to Thieu and Vinh. It would augment the training of non-coms and officers being done by attachés.

Mr. Packard: One thing we should do is get MACV's recommendations.

Dr. Kissinger: Can we act on that?

Gen. Westmoreland: Yes. We can ask MACV what more needs to be done in the way of training.

Mr. Irwin: When you request recommendations, you can at the same time suggest using Vietnamese units as demonstrators.

Gen. Westmoreland: Yes.

Mr. Packard: I'll discuss this with the Admiral Moorer when he gets back.

Capt. Sansom: This [training method] was suggested in Part 1 of the NSSM 99 study with regard to the territorial forces.

Dr. Kissinger: I have thought that the North Vietnamese might want to give the South Vietnamese a blow during the 1971 election campaign. Also they might want to do the same to us in 1972. But from your projections, they won't be able to do it.

Mr. Carver: They would like very much to do just that, but they can't.

Dr. Kissinger: You don't think they can give a major blow this year?

Mr. Carver: They don't presently seem to have the forces or the disposition to do so. A major military offensive does not seem to be in the cards.

⁷ Reference is to Operation Cuu Long 44/02, an RVNAF-FANK action with U.S. air support to clear the Pich Nil Pass and open Route 4 between Kompong Som and Phnom Penh. According to a January 16 memorandum for the record prepared in the National Military Command Center, the operation began at 12:18 p.m. on January 16. Pursley forwarded a copy of the memorandum to Eliot under a covering memorandum, January 19, noting that Laird had suggested it be held closely. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, DEF 6 CAMB)

Dr. Kissinger: They could be building up for a major offensive next year.

Mr. Carver: There are no signs yet.

Dr. Kissinger: When did you first pick up indications of the Tet offensive?

Mr. Carver: The build-up started in October 1967. The first manifestation appeared in September; then the build-up proceeded through October, November, and December. Thus, we had indications about four months ahead.

Dr. Kissinger: In that case, there is no conceivable way we could know now whether there is going to be an offensive.

Mr. Carver: That's true. However, the longer the enemy goes without a major military success, the more he will have to exert himself to boost the morale of the populace and the cadre. Yet, there are risks if he tries anything.

Dr. Kissinger: Then things will continue about the same in the absence of an initiative on their part.

Mr. Carver: The longer the South Vietnamese can keep things from getting worse, the more it is up to Hanoi to move.

Mr. Irwin: They might be able to concentrate their forces to make what could give the appearance of being a significant attack in MR 1.

Mr. Carver: Yes, but we could detect this in advance if they tried it.

Mr. Packard: What about the condition of our forces? Do we have the troops and the firepower? How do they shape up relative to 1968?

Gen. Westmoreland: It would be fair to say that our strength is comparable.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Helms) Can you provide us a projection of enemy strategy alternatives in 1972? I recognize that you can't say precisely that they will mount a large-scale offensive or that they will do something else, but we would like to have your estimate.

Mr. Carver: We have to understand that what they can do in 1972 depends on what they do in 1971.

Mr. Helms: We will do the best projection we can.

Dr. Kissinger: Now we come to the political strategies. I understand this paper was mainly prepared by State.⁸ (to Irwin and Johnson) Can one of you brief us on this?

Mr. Irwin: Alex [Johnson] is the expert.

Mr. Johnson: I have been out. (to Wilson) Can you do it?

⁸ This refers to the Strategic Thrusts study summarized in Document 102.

Mr. Wilson: The paper discusses a combination of political and military considerations; the strategies set forth vary in terms of their political and military components.

The high option would attempt to induce Hanoi, principally by military means, to terminate rapidly its military effort.

The second strategy has two options—A and B. Both of them seek, by a combination of political and military measures, to erode North Vietnam's determination and ability to dominate Indochina. This strategy also seeks to maintain viable anti-communist governments in South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand and an acceptable military-political balance in Laos. Option A would attempt to tie down enemy forces in as many areas as possible and to exhaust North Vietnamese capabilities to achieve a decisive success in any critical area. Option B would focus on the defense of the most important areas and seek to exhaust the North Vietnamese by exacting a high cost if they attempt to enter the defended areas. This option has two variants. Variant 1 would seek to inhibit enemy operations in South Laos. Variant 2 would establish a defense in South Vietnam and critical portions of Cambodia. The emphasis in Strategy Two would be on the protection of population. It would entail devoting more resources to pacification and counter-insurgency.

Strategy Three is principally political. It would seek by reducing the level of violence to shift the conflict to the political arena and to arrive at a framework for mutual accommodation. It would seek to maintain an anti-communist government in Thailand and non-communist governments in Cambodia, South Vietnam, and Laos.

Strategy Four would seek to extricate US military forces from South Vietnam as rapidly as possible while attempting to maintain US credibility.

Dr. Kissinger: How would you do that? Everyone here is all for it if you could find a way.

Mr. Wilson: That's the weakness of this strategy. Maintenance of independent governments in parts of Laos and Cambodia would be part of this strategy.

Dr. Kissinger: As an abstract statement no one would quarrel with Strategy Four. The question is: what do you propose to do?

Mr. Johnson and Mr. Irwin: This strategy is not realistic.

Mr. Wilson: The Working Group thought that it was not realistic but felt that the option ought to be presented because it represents the thinking of a sizable group in this country.

Mr. Irwin: It doesn't even represent their thinking. They don't care about credibility.

Running through all of this strategy discussion is the question of what our overall policy toward Thailand should be. We [the State De-

partment] come out supporting a combination of Strategies Two and Three on the assumption that you can't do much on Strategy Three until you have achieved something on Strategy Two. But we have to decide what we prefer Thailand to do and also what it is possible to get the Thais to do.

Dr. Kissinger: The President has ruled on the first question several times. In extremis he wants to use Thai forces in Laos and Cambodia. In fact, he has done it.

Mr. Irwin: He has done it in Laos.

Dr. Kissinger: The story of trying to make arrangements for using Thai forces has been my great bureaucratic saga. If it hasn't been done, it isn't because the orders haven't been given. Speaking seriously, there are two key questions with regard to Thailand. One is what we do while the war is going on in Indochina. If it comes to a choice between the collapse of Cambodia and the use of Thai troops, I can say with assurance that the President would rule in favor of using Thai troops. It is also important to discuss what happens with Thailand after the war. This has not been discussed. It is something that should go to the President.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, it should go to him.

Mr. Packard: What the Thais do now depends on what we are willing to do for them in the long term. We are going to a lot of effort and getting very little capability. Strategy Two, Option A is the one I think we ought to do.

Dr. Kissinger: As I understand George Carver's analysis, we can proceed this year on the basis that nothing is going to happen that can't be handled by South Vietnamese and Cambodian troops.

Mr. Carver: This is the conclusion one comes to on the basis of what has happened to date.

Mr. Packard: We should not attempt to plan the use of Thai troops in Cambodia at this time. We ought to get them to concentrate on their own defenses. If we need Thai troops in Cambodia later, we can use them.

Mr. Johnson: For legal reasons the rationale for doing anything with the Thais has to be the defense of Thailand.

Mr. Irwin: We have checked this out. We have no alternative but to focus our effort on the defense of Thailand.

Dr. Kissinger: Let's get this to a WSAG meeting this coming week.

Mr. Packard: What we are proposing is all we can do legally.

Dr. Kissinger: The legal situation should not determine the pace.

Mr. Packard: No. We can move ahead just as fast [regardless of the legal question].

Dr. Kissinger: We must be in the maximum position to prevent a Cambodian collapse in 1972.

Mr. Packard: What we do is move ahead [with building up the Thais]. Then at the time when they are needed in Cambodia, we have them available.

Dr. Kissinger: That is not what Jack [Irwin] said.

Mr. Irwin: I agree with Dave [Packard].

Dr. Kissinger: Then I misunderstood you.

Mr. Packard: We can get the Thais ready just as fast this way as the other way.

Dr. Kissinger: If the issue is the legal justification, then that is not a policy matter. But if, as I suspect, the issue is a slowdown on the Thai program, then we need to have a look at it.

Mr. Irwin: It is not a slowdown. The question is how much we should push this with the Thais.

Dr. Kissinger: That's the same thing. I am not interested in the justification used. However, to be consistent with what the President has repeatedly stated, the pace [of our efforts with the Thais] must be kept up at a fast rate. We must make sure that we still have the option.

Mr. Packard: We are quietly negotiating with the Thais. I think we can arrange funding.

Mr. Helms: If the money is available, there will be no problems.

Dr. Kissinger: There is a philosophic difference on this question in this group. For more than a year this difference has never been made explicit. All I can do is transmit my clear understanding that the President wants to have Thai troops available if necessary to prevent the collapse of Cambodia. This is not the preferred course of action. I know that there are those who have strong feelings against using the Thais outside of Thailand. But we should not foreclose this option. If we are all agreed on doing this, then I don't care about the justification.

Mr. Packard: That is exactly what we want to do.

Dr. Kissinger: Then let's move ahead on it.

Mr. Johnson: I think it would be useful to have this group think through how we go about employing the Thais in extremis.

Mr. Irwin: This would be a question of coming up with a definition of when the situation is extreme enough to bring in the Thais.

Dr. Kissinger: We have to have a paper on Thailand, so that we can raise this issue.

In connection with the Thrusts Paper, there is a statement on page 22 that we should "accelerate political and diplomatic efforts to show our peaceful intentions and willingness to solve the conflict if the other side really wants peace; this could include further explicit statements at Paris".

In the abstract this doesn't bother me. However, I would appreciate it if someone could tell me what the hell our statement is going to be.

Mr. Johnson: (to Wilson) Can you adumbrate that?

Mr. Wilson: No, I can't.

Mr. Johnson: We have said about all we can say.

Dr. Kissinger: Similarly, there is the discussion of Thrust Three on page 26, which speaks of "direct pressures on the GVN to increasingly broaden the base of their government and begin a process of mutual accommodation with the PRG and DRV". To my more literal mind, this doesn't say anything other than that we should accept most of their [the North Vietnamese] proposals.

Mr. Wilson: That is the "sell-out" strategy [i.e., Strategy Four].

Dr. Kissinger: I am speaking of Strategy Three.

Capt. Sansom: Strategy Three is the "sell-out". Strategy Four is the "bug-out".

Mr. Wilson: This [the language on page 26] would imply somewhat greater pressure than we are presently putting on the GVN.

Dr. Kissinger: When we discuss this again, could you spell these things out operationally so that they won't be so vague? Then if the President says "I take this option", he will know what he is choosing.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, then he will know what we mean.

Dr. Kissinger: He will know what *you* mean. (to Smith) I would prefer to schedule a discussion of the economic papers separately.

Can we spend ten minutes on Laos? (to Johnson) Can you bring us up to date?

Mr. Johnson: The two princes are still fencing over arrangements for the next talks at Khang Khay. The Pathet Lao demands have been gradually cut back from a complete cessation of bombing in Xieng Khouang (where Khang Khay is located) and Sam Neua provinces to a cessation in Xieng Khouang. There has been no dialogue recently. The question is whether we should go out of our way to suggest to Souvanna that he take the initiative to move the talks ahead. Should we put up any suggestion for a ceasefire in the Khang Khay area in order to help get the talks going? The talks could perhaps turn to our operations in the South over the longer term. Our thought is that we might well go to Souvanna and specifically suggest that we stand down air operations in Xieng Khouang.

Mr. Packard: Except for reconnaissance.

Mr. Johnson: There would be a standstill on the ground with a cessation of reinforcement and resupply. Our proposal is to go out to Ambassador Godley and see what he thinks. Then depending on his reaction, we could decide whether to go further.

Mr. Helms: On the theory that you don't catch any fish if you don't go fishing, I think we ought to put this to Godley.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Gen. Westmoreland) What do you think?

Gen. Westmoreland: I think it's a good idea.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Irwin) Jack?

Mr. Irwin: I agree.

Dr. Kissinger: I think we can certainly ask Godley what he thinks. If we can get some scaling down in Northern Laos, it could be a plus.

Gen. Westmoreland: The only disadvantage is that it might free North Vietnamese troops for use elsewhere.

Mr. Johnson: Not many.

Gen. Westmoreland: The 312th Division is on its way back to North Laos. However, any disadvantage of this sort could be more than outweighed by the lessening of pressure in North Laos. We really have to give Vang Pao a break.

Dr. Kissinger: It would take three months for the division to move south.

Gen. Westmoreland: Probably they could move faster. Since they are already on the move, presumably they are in good shape.

Dr. Kissinger: Let's approve the cable.⁹

⁹ The cable authorizing Godley to suggest to Souvanna Phouma a cease-fire in Khang Khay to get the talks between the Royal Lao Government and Pathet Lao moving has not been found.

104. Memorandum for the President's File by the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)¹

Washington, January 18, 1971.

SUBJECT

Meeting Between The President, Secretary Rogers, Secretary Laird, Admiral Moorer, Director Helms and Dr. Kissinger (10:55 a.m.–12:00 noon and 12:42 p.m. to 1:36 p.m.)

The meeting was convened at 10:55 a.m. in the President's Oval Office² so that the President and his principal advisors could hear a personal report from Secretary Laird and Admiral Moorer on their trip to Thailand and South Vietnam with stop enroute in Paris.³

After a brief discussion of the professional football championship game (superbowl) which took place the preceding day, the President asked Secretary Laird to provide the group with a report on his trip to Southeast Asia and Paris.

Secretary Laird began his report by stating that he had followed closely the theme of the President's foreign policy objectives of strength, partnership and willingness to negotiate throughout the trip. The first portion of the trip included a stop in Paris where discussions were held with both the U.S. and South Vietnamese Delegations to the Paris talks.

Secretary Laird indicated that the general consensus was one of no specific hope in the Paris forum. He stated, however, that he agreed generally with the proposition that the talks must continue as a means of posturing both the South Vietnamese and the U.S. Governments for the upcoming elections to be held in both countries. Mr. Laird listed the following considerations:

—For Thieu the peace issue will be paramount in his coming elections. He will, therefore, need to make some political initiatives.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 83, Memoranda for the President, Beginning January 17, 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information.

² In a January 18 memorandum to Nixon, Kissinger noted that one of the meeting's key purposes was to inform Rogers and Helms about the dry season campaign operations and that it was important that no decisions be made on troop withdrawals until after the campaign. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 226, Agency Files, Department of Defense, Vol. X)

³ The two men traveled to Paris, Bangkok, South Vietnam, and Japan January 5–15. Laird forwarded a copy of his trip report to Rogers under a covering memorandum, January 19. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 15–1 DEF 7 US) Moore's trip report, CM–525–71, January 21, was distributed within the Department of Defense. (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–76–207, Box 14, Viet 333 Moorer)

—President Thieu is seeking some new political initiative which can be tabled at an early date.

—Interdepartmentally, this Government should investigate possible initiatives which might be taken by the South Vietnamese in the political area.

Secretary Laird continued that he was concerned that some Administration spokesmen were referring to the end of the war as an objective to be achieved prior to the U.S. November elections. He stated that President Thieu had cautioned him on this and that we must shift the thrust of this statement to encompass direct U.S. participation in the war since the war itself may continue for many years. Secretary Rogers interjected that he had made a careful point of moving to this posture in his recent press conferences.⁴ The President commented that our foreign policy objective by 1972 should involve peace for the U.S., emphasizing that it would be impractical to assume that we could solve all of the world problems.

[Omitted here is discussion of Thailand, printed in *Foreign Relations*, 1969–1976, volume XX, Southeast Asia, 1969–1972, Document 105.]

The President then commented that he had been encouraged by the recent report on the performance of Thai forces in Laos. Admiral Moorer stated that this was the first SGU battalion that had been formed by the Thais. He noted that the conduct of the battle was well executed by the Thais, who permitted the enemy to get inside their positions and then inflicted great damage on them.

The President then remarked that he had recently read an excellent press story on Cambodia and that these were the kinds of stories which would insure the proper attitude in the U.S. Mr. Helms stated that the Cambodians have certainly demonstrated an outstanding will but that now their requirement was to learn how to operate their forces.

[Omitted here is discussion of Thailand, printed in *Foreign Relations*, 1969–1976, volume XX, Southeast Asia, 1969–1972, Document 105.]

The President stated that he wanted it clearly understood that the U.S. was on a razor's edge with respect to the Nixon Doctrine in Southeast Asia. While we have made our policy clear, the press has consistently distorted it to our disadvantage. The President stressed that we must retain our presence in Thailand, and in all Southeast Asia, to include the Philippines, South Vietnam and Korea. The idea that the Nixon Doctrine constituted a formula for reducing our presence to zero

⁴ Rogers made this point in his news conference on December 23. The text is printed in the Department of State *Bulletin*, January 11, 1971, pp. 37–48.

was neither true nor in our interest. The President emphasized that it was important that we reassure our allies in this respect. Secretary Laird remarked that military assistance was the essential element since our Asian allies have the manpower resources.

In continuing his discourse on our relationships with our allies, the President stated that this same philosophy applied worldwide. That was why Senator Percy had been so much in error. We need a continued presence in Europe and in terms of our worldwide position, we cannot permit ourselves to slip into a weak conventional force posture. We need a strong conventional posture abroad. We should now be thinking about permanent U.S./Asian and European force deployments. Our Soviet and Chinese friends watch this issue intensely and they draw great comfort and attach great significance to reductions in our force levels abroad.

Secretary Laird remarked that we have to sell this issue to the American people. He commented that a 1-1/2 war strategy was not saleable but rather we should sell it on the grounds of a realistic deterrent consisting of adequate conventional, tactical nuclear and nuclear forces.

The President commented that Congressional proponents were the first to complain when we cut bases here in the U.S. if they involved their constituents. Mr. Helms stated it was obvious that the Thais must have continued reassurance from us and that they had already started to refurbish their lines with the Chinese Communists. The President restated that we should bring the Thai King on a visit to the U.S. The President instructed Secretary Laird, Admiral Moorer and Dr. Kissinger, as appropriate, to bring Senators in and to talk about the importance of Thailand and the need to avoid future hearings such as those conducted by Senator Symington.

Secretary Rogers commented that he was convinced the situation in the Foreign Relations Committee was now a great deal better. Secretary Laird added that the Communists was now obviously split and that the Son Tay operation had been largely responsible for this. Secretary Rogers stated that the Department of State was also breakfasting with members of the Committee and that this had improved communications immeasurably. Secretary Laird remarked that the Department of Defense was also working with the Committee on a regular basis.

Secretary Laird then turned to his trip to South Vietnam, commenting first on his extended two-hour intimate discussion with President Thieu⁵ which was followed by a two-hour luncheon. The meet-

⁵ Pursley forwarded a memorandum of conversation of this January 11 meeting to Eliot under a covering memorandum, January 19. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL US-VIET S)

ing included General Abrams, Ambassador Bunker and Secretary Laird, with General Pursley taking notes. President Thieu had only one assistant in the meeting. Secretary Laird summarized his discussions with President Thieu as follows:

—Thieu is concerned about his election date and is equally concerned about the U.S. Presidential election date.

—Thieu is concerned that the U.S. is talking too much about the end of the war by 1972. He is convinced that the war will go on for many years and that we should be talking about U.S. participation.

—Thieu stated he would need information on our force levels, especially specific data on what those levels will be by the time of his election as well as by the time of the U.S. Presidential election. Thieu emphasized that he does not want a repeat of 1968 where U.S. domestic political considerations influenced decisions on troop levels which proved to be most damaging to the conduct of the war. Thieu stated that he was thinking along the following hypothetical lines:

—if the United States were planning on withdrawing between 150,000 to 175,000 more troops by June 1972, he could probably handle it with proper economic and military assistance:

—he hoped that we would withdraw no more than one-third of this number up to the time of his elections in October and thus proceed with the larger two-thirds increment following his elections.

Secretary Laird told the group he had replied to President Thieu by stating that he had not come to South Vietnam to discuss troop levels but welcomed Thieu's ideas. Secretary Laird added that inter-departmentally all U.S. documents were still referring to a June 1972 troop level of approximately 200,000 but that, in reality, he had a group of about seven individuals working on this subject with the actual figures. Because of the sensitivity of this issue, he had not included references to specific troop levels in his trip report. Secretary Laird added that General Abrams believed they could handle the troop levels that were actually being considered and emphasized that the decisions on residual forces should be left to General Abrams and General Weyand.

Secretary Rogers asked what Secretary Laird meant by General Abrams' assessment that he could handle the problem. To what order of magnitude was Secretary Laird specifically referring? Secretary Laird replied that the current thinking would provide for a draw-down of between 100,000/110,000/120,000 residual U.S. forces in Vietnam by mid-summer of 1972. Dr. Kissinger remarked that this would mean we would withdraw between 50,000 and 75,000 over the period May 1 to October 1 of this year.

Dr. Kissinger also asked whether or not it would be possible to get below 100,000 U.S. troops by November 1972. Secretary Laird replied

that this depended on the degree of success of this year's dry season campaign.

The President indicated that, with respect to troop announcements, he wanted the issue to remain somewhat obscure in terms of numbers. The U.S. goal should be to end the United States combat role as soon as South Vietnam was ready. Our program was on schedule and it was as simple as that. When the time came for a withdrawal announcement, we should consider phrasing such an announcement in terms of the American role rather than specific numbers.⁶ Secretary Rogers stated that he agreed fully that we should avoid committing ourselves with respect to a specific timeframe with respect to numbers. The President indicated that when he makes his announcement around April 15, he may cover a long period of time in his announcement rather than continue incremental announcements.

Secretary Laird stated that Thieu's problem was that he wanted to insure he could explain to his people at the time of his election that there were still at least 200,000 U.S. forces in South Vietnam. Thieu will probably start to take the credit on the subject of U.S. troop levels and will talk about the ability to reduce our levels so that he can be out in front of us on the issue.

Secretary Laird concluded that on balance South Vietnamese competence was especially high—that in 1968 at the time of Tet, the South Vietnamese were in a difficult position. This year, they were looking intensively at all of their problems—political, military and economic. General Thin, Commanding General of the ARVN 25th Division, was now talking like American Generals spoke just a year ago. He was referring to the need for the South Vietnamese doing the job rather than allowing the Cambodians to do it. Two years ago, our Commanders were saying the same thing about the South Vietnamese. Secretary Laird stated that the competence was high in the aftermath of the successful Cambodian incursion which had drastically improved the situation.

The President then commented that it might be of some value to have President Thieu talk about additional U.S. withdrawals prior to the President's announcement in mid-April.

Secretary Laird next turned to the dry season operations, utilizing maps for the discussion. The Secretary discussed first the Route 4 clearing operation, mentioning that we had moved two helicopter platoons, the *Iwo Jima* and the *Cleveland*, to a position off the southern

⁶ In his diary, Haldeman noted that he, Kissinger, and Nixon also discussed the troop withdrawal rate on January 18. He noted that Nixon expected to withdraw about 12,000 a month up until the South Vietnamese elections in October and would announce a "massive withdrawal" thereafter. (*The Haldeman Diaries*, p. 235)

coast of Cambodia and that these vessels were providing helicopter and logistical support to the ARVN marines and Cambodians who were attempting to open Route 4 from Kompong Som to Phnom Penh. Secretary Laird said that this operation could be justified in terms of preventing the re-establishment of the enemy sanctuaries. The President affirmed that we should make the point that, of course, we were going to use our air assets against the enemy who was now trying to re-establish sanctuaries and thus was threatening our remaining forces.

Secretary Laird suggested that we slip away from the term "interdiction." The President remarked that this term seemed all right to him. Secretary Laird replied that he meant the term "interdiction" in contrast to "close air support." The President reiterated that we should describe our air support in terms of the prevention of re-establishment of enemy sanctuaries.

The President asked Secretary Rogers for his view on this issue. Secretary Rogers stated that we should emphasize that there were no U.S. ground forces or advisors involved, but that we would continue to use air and logistical support to prevent the re-establishment of sanctuaries. The Secretary stated, however, that he was somewhat concerned about the length of time we would be utilizing our carriers off the coast of southern Cambodia. Secretary Laird replied that we should be able to conclude the Route 4 operation in about three weeks and that we should take the public line that we were providing assistance only when the ARVN was unable to do the job. The President confirmed that Secretary Rogers had a good point, and we should also emphasize that the operation is temporary and that it would be terminated within three weeks.

Admiral Moorer commented that the South Vietnamese forces were getting better all the time.

The President then stated that he wanted to be sure that all understood that this operation on Route 4, with the kind of U.S. support involved, would not go on indefinitely and that a new decision would be required for the extension of U.S. support. In other words, the President expected the military to come back and request new authority. Secretary Rogers remarked that he believed that there might be too many ARVN forces involved, since he could not understand why it was necessary to have 4,000 ARVN forces when there were only about 1,000 enemy interdicting Route 4.

The President reiterated that our public line on the Route 4 operation would be that we were providing air and logistical support to the South Vietnamese and Cambodians to prevent the re-establishment of sanctuaries by the enemy. The President made the point that he did not like to use the term "the other side" when we were actually referring to the enemy.

Secretary Laird then turned to the Chup Plantation operation. He pointed out that probing operations were already under way opposite III Corps and along Route 7 in Cambodia. He stated that the original plan provided for a jump-off date of January 18, but that ARVN commanders had cautioned Thieu that the Tet holidays (January 26–28) might intervene and that they had therefore decided to hold off on the main operation until about February 4.

Secretary Laird pointed out that General Tri had conducted a raid operation in a village which was reported to contain four U.S. POW's—that the operation had been very successful but no prisoners were found. Thirty VC prisoners were taken. Secretary Rogers asked whether or not any U.S. forces were involved. Secretary Laird answered that only U.S. helicopters were involved. The President commented that obviously the helicopters were employed to help the South Vietnamese help the Cambodians.

Secretary Laird continued his presentation on the Chup operation, commenting that the operation could commence on or about the first of February with the first phase lasting about two weeks. The President asked how many ARVN forces would be involved in the first phase and Secretary Laird replied, "about 7,000." The President commented that if the enemy does not fight, it might not be a good operation. Dr. Kissinger stated that this was not a crucial issue, for whether or not the enemy fought, it would be disrupted in its efforts to re-establish the sanctuaries, to put pressure on the Cambodians or to launch subsequent attacks into III Corps. Secretary Laird stated that, ultimately, the Chup plan called for about 20,000 ARVN troops. They would attack west along Route 7 to Kompong Cham and then north into the Chup Plantation as far as the elbow of the Mekong. Then, in the final phase they would move to the south to link up with other ARVN forces attacking northwest along Route 1.

Admiral Moorer commented that this was an important operation because it would set back enemy efforts to re-establish base areas adjacent to III Corps. Intelligence now suggested that the regiments of the 9th VC Division were in this area awaiting supplies and there was also evidence that several NVA elements had crossed the border in III Corps and were already approaching the Tay Ninh area. The President stated that the plan made great sense. Secretary Laird commented that the plan could be justified on the same basis as last year's operation. The President asked whether the entire ARVN force would be lifted in by air. Secretary Laird stated that this was not the case, the bulk of them would move overland along Route 7.

The President then called an intermission in the meeting for 15 minutes. The group reconvened at 12:45 p.m. Secretary Laird began this phase of the meeting by continuing to describe the Chup opera-

tion. He stated that the operation would be under the command of the ARVN Third Corps Commander, General Tri and it would serve the dual purposes of buying time for the Cambodians to rebuild and minimizing the threat to South Vietnam's Third Corps. Admiral Moorer stated that the operation would extend through the entire dry season.

Secretary Laird then turned to an explanation of the Tchepone operation in southern Laos. He stated that the operation was scheduled to start in early February, although phase one, which included establishing a departure base at Khe Sanh air base, setting up blocking positions south of the DMZ, and emplacing U.S. heavy artillery along the Laotian border, would commence as early as January 29. The plan was designed to provide for the capture of the logistics control center at Tchepone through a combined air mobile operation to seize the field and a ground linkup along Route 9. The ARVN airborne division would execute the air mobile operation and the 1st ARVN Division would be in overall command of the ground linkup. U.S. air and heavy artillery support would be extensive. Helicopter troop and logistics lift, gunship support and B-52 operations in Laos would also be involved.

Secretary Laird stated that he had asked General Abrams to delete two facets of the plan which involved the use of B-52's in the southern area of North Vietnam and provided for the establishment of U.S. logistical bases along Route 9. Director Helms commented that this operation has long been under consideration but was considered one that could not be safely accomplished. Secretary Laird stated that President Thieu felt Souvanna might have political problems and demand withdrawal of South Vietnamese forces after the operation got underway. He felt that his initial reaction might not be negative. Secretary Laird added that President Thieu was concerned about the manner in which the operation would be justified. Thieu had speculated that perhaps it could be justified as a "hot pursuit" operation. In any event, it was probable that we would have some problems with Souvanna and the Laotians. Director Helms stated that the Laotians would probably complain just as a pro forma action.

The President then asked whether or not Ambassador Godley had commented on this issue. Admiral Moorer answered that he had discussed it in general terms. The President stated he would hope that Souvanna would take the position that all foreign forces should be removed from Laos. In any event, the U.S. position would not be too critical since we were limiting our efforts to bombing and airlifts. Secretary Laird added that we would also be involved in medical evacuation and would provide heavy artillery support from South Vietnam.

Admiral Moorer continued the discussion of the operation by indicating that the 5th Mechanized Brigade would be the U.S. force involved along the Laotian border. He added that since we have fre-

quently opened Route 9 westward to the Laotian border and the A Shau Valley, the preliminary measures would not provide too definitive a signal to the enemy. Khe Sanh Airfield would be reopened to provide the logistical airhead and old U.S. code names characteristic of A Shau Valley operations would be used in conjunction with phase one of the plan. Secretary Laird stated that, nevertheless, we should anticipate that the enemy expected us to launch the operation into Laos since they have obviously held the bulk of their forces there for some reason. Dr. Kissinger stated that if the enemy stood and fought, it would be to our advantage, adding that the enemy might be set back in its timetable as much as a year. Secretary Laird agreed, adding that this was the crucial supply hub for the North Vietnamese.

The President then commented that there was no question but that we would get some real heat. He added, however, that if the operation blunted the enemy's capacity to hurt us as we draw down to less than 100,000 by November 1972, then our risks would be reduced. Should we fail to undertake the operation, we might be able to continue with our deployments, but there was a chance that without the operation we could get a rap in 1972. Furthermore, the operation was a strong deterrent to the enemy for subsequent operations on their part and it might, in fact, prove decisive in the overall conduct of the war.

Secretary Laird agreed with the President's assessment stating that this was our last opportunity to free the ARVN forces from major operations in Cambodia. By May 1, the U.S. forces would be depleted to 45,000 first-line combat units. Therefore, this was the time to move. Dr. Kissinger said that when the rains start in May or June, the enemy has normally shut down the trail until the next October or November. Therefore, this operation will buy us at least six months and maybe more. Secretary Laird stated that all of these considerations convinced him that we must move as soon as possible. Secretary Rogers asked when this would be. Secretary Laird answered that phase two should begin on the 8th or 9th of February, with phase one beginning at the end of January or at least by the 2nd of February.

The President stated that both the Chup and Tchepone operations will be conducted at the same time and that this should be advantageous. Admiral Moorer commented that the Vietnamese would move the airborne division north from III to I Corps. The airborne division which normally serves as the strategic reserve would be replaced by the Vietnamese marines who were now involved in the Highway 4 operation.

The President then remarked that from the military standpoint, the operation made great sense. Domestically, it would pose a problem since the charge would be made that the U.S. was expanding the war into Laos. The President asked if there were any known legislative in-

hibitions to the U.S. support visualized. Secretary Laird responded negatively. The President continued that it was probable that we should accept the heat this spring. If it goes in February, then perhaps by April 15 we could make a terminal statement.

The President then asked Secretary Rogers for his view. The Secretary stated that he was aware of no legislative inhibitions since they only involved the use of U.S. ground forces. Also, the new legislation made great emphasis on providing authorities to prevent rebuilding of the sanctuaries. Director Helms added that even Senator Fulbright agreed with the need to prevent that. Secretary Rogers continued that, in his view, the real problem involved U.S. casualties and whether or not they might go up, either because of the air operations in Laos or as a result of the thinning of ARVN forces in I Corps.

Admiral Moorer estimated that our casualties would not increase measurably. The President noted that the artillery bases along the border might pose some tempting targets. Admiral Moorer agreed and said there would also possibly be some helicopter casualties but that it would be nothing like those suffered last spring in Cambodia by our ground forces. Secretary Rogers stated that if U.S. casualties did not escalate, the political problem should be manageable. The President noted that if casualties remained at the 40/60/70 level, this should be acceptable.

Mr. Helms then commented that it was probable that the ARVN would run into a very tough fight in Laos. Admiral Moorer agreed that this was so, but added that it would probably be the enemy's last gasp. Dr. Kissinger stated that, most importantly, it would take the enemy a long time to recover. Secretary Rogers said the whole concept was consistent with the Nixon Doctrine. The main difficulty would be whether or not it fails or succeeds. The U.S. attitude had to be one of confidence and assurance once the operation got under way.

The President stated that we should come out frankly and say what we were doing now on Route 4 and treat the Chup operation the same way, similar to the manner in which he described the air strikes in North Vietnam. The enemy has been warned and we are merely doing what we said we would do. Secretary Rogers agreed. He said that we should be proud of the ARVN's capability to conduct such an operation, for it would raise doubts in the enemy's mind as to whether or not the ARVN would attack north.

The President then remarked that we should also conduct commando operations in North Vietnam concurrently. Secretary Laird stated we had better look at that after these operations since our plate was already full.

Secretary Rogers commented that an ARVN defeat would be very costly to us. The President replied that the operation cannot come out

as a defeat. Therefore, we must set very limited goals such as interdicting the trail—keep our claims modest. It should be packaged as a raid on the sanctuaries. Further, however, even though this was a difficult operation, the ARVN should be able to do it. If they were not able to do it, then we must know that also. Admiral Moorer stated that we were forcing the enemy to fight on our terms. They will have to react.

Secretary Rogers then stated that this was known as a very difficult area. Admiral Moorer replied that the main problem has always been political restraints, the Geneva Convention, and the neutrality of Laos. Secretary Laird commented that President Thieu was well aware of the difficulties and that was why he had chosen his two best units for the task. The President said the situation had changed somewhat also. Therefore, we should keep all the numbers we need of ARVN forces. It was obvious that the enemy was weak in Cambodia and current reports indicated that they were getting weaker. Certainly the 500,000 dead they have suffered so far must have had an impact. Admiral Moorer stated that this was precisely what Japanese Prime Minister Sato had told him his report suggested.

The President said another rationale was the need to prepare the way for further U.S. reductions and the early arrival at a residual U.S. force posture. In this regard, a residual force would be necessary as long as the enemy held our prisoners. Secretary Laird said that he agreed fully and that we could not get into a situation of piecemeal exchanges on the prisoner issue. Secretary Rogers stated that he visualized no problem on the residual force issue—that it had been discussed on the Hill and had caused no problem.

The President commented that the best way to proceed was to be open on the whole thing. Secretary Laird asserted that he was convinced the plan would work. He again noted that General Abrams had wanted to use B-52's in North Vietnam but that he had overruled this. The President stated we would hold up on a decision on that and see how things developed. In the meantime, authorization was granted to proceed with the Laotian operation. It should be conveyed in the context of a raid on an enemy base area—as consistent with the Nixon Doctrine—with limited goals and we should avoid all exaggerated claims. Following the operation, we could crow about accomplishments.

Secretary Rogers said it was urgent now that we decide on when and how to approach Souvanna. Dr. Kissinger said that we should not do this too early because he may prefer not to know. Secretary Laird said that he was thinking in terms of 24- or 48-hours notice. Dr. Kissinger noted that we only gave Lon Nol 24-hours notice last spring. Secretary Rogers said whether or not we do it late or early, we must be sure to bring him abroad.

At that point the President thanked Secretary Laird for his report and the meeting adjourned.

Alexander M. Haig, Jr.⁷
Brigadier General, U.S. Army

⁷ Printed from a copy that bears Haig's typed signature.

105. Memorandum for the Record¹

Washington, January 19, 1971, noon.

SUBJECT

Minutes of the WSAG Meeting

PARTICIPANTS

U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Department of State
David Packard, Deputy Secretary of Defense, Department of Defense
Admiral Moorer, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
Lt. Gen. Robert E. Cushman, Jr., Deputy Director, Central Intelligence Agency
Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Brig. Gen. Alexander M. Haig, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

Dr. Kissinger opened the meeting by informing the group that the meeting was being convened to discuss two future military operations by South Vietnamese forces. These would be conducted outside South Vietnam and had been approved by the President in a meeting with the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Director of Central Intelligence on the preceding day.²

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 83, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol I. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. The meeting ended at 12:50 p.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76, Record of Schedule) In a memorandum to Kissinger, January 19, Haig noted that the primary purpose of the meeting was to initiate Washington level planning and coordination for the dry season offensive and that it was being restricted to WSAG principals only. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-79, WSAG Meetings, (Principals Only) Vietnam 1–19–71)

² See Document 104.

Dr. Kissinger stated that there were actually three operations involved. The first was the clearing operation along Route 4 which was currently under way. Dr. Kissinger did not feel that operation required much discussion at the meeting. The two subsequent operations would be conducted in the near future, and Dr. Kissinger asked Admiral Moorer to discuss plans for these operations.

Admiral Moorer stated that on approximately February 4, 1971, ARVN forces would initiate an operation targeted on the area of the Chup Plantation, north and east of Kompong Cham. The operation would involve between 20,000 and 22,000 South Vietnamese forces in an area where there were approximately 12,000 enemy forces. The operation was designed to extend through the entire dry season and would consist of three phases:

—Phase 1 would involve a drive by South Vietnamese forces west along route 7 toward Kompong Cham. Concurrently, South Vietnamese forces would also attack northwest along Route 1.

—Phase 2 would involve operations north of route 7 into the Chup Plantation area up to the elbow of the Mekong River. This phase of the operation would be launched as soon as route 7 had been opened as far west as Kompong Cham.

—Phase 3 would involve a sweep south of route 7 by ARVN forces, including a link-up of the northern Task Forces, with the ARVN forces attacking northwest from route 1.

Mr. Johnson inquired about the coordination of the operation, how it would be done, and whether or not we were leaving it entirely to the South Vietnamese and the Cambodians to resolve. Mr. Kissinger replied that this was essentially the procedure which was being followed although General Abrams was obviously aware of the coordination involved. Admiral Moorer stated that he was quite sure that Lon Nol was thoroughly apprised of the forthcoming operation. He added that U.S. involvement in the operation would consist of air support, logistics lift, medical evacuation and gunship support and that these arrangements were also being worked out locally. Admiral Moorer stated that he would contact General Abrams following the meeting and insure that necessary coordination was under control. Dr. Kissinger added that the purpose of the meeting was to prepare a check list for these requirements.

Admiral Moorer then continued his presentation, stating that the Chup operation would start around February 4th but that the date was not yet precise.

Mr. Johnson then interjected a question concerning the route 4 operation which was under way, asking whether or not the Cambodians could be expected to hold the route open once it had been cleared by the South Vietnamese. Admiral Moorer replied that the South Viet-

namese assistance would enable the Cambodians to occupy the high ground in the Pich Nil Pass which they have never held before and that this fact, together with ample U.S. air support, should enable the Cambodians to do quite well.

Admiral Moorer also pointed out that in the route clearing operation then under way, we had moved two helicopter platforms—the *Cleveland* which actually carried the helicopters and the *Iwo Jima* which was providing the logistic support off the southern coast of Cambodia. The *Cleveland* was operating within five miles of the coast and the *Iwo Jima* was farther out to sea in international waters. Mr. Johnson asked whether or not the helicopters were Marine or Army. Admiral Moorer confirmed that Army aviation was involved.

Admiral Moorer then turned to the Tchepone operation in Southern Laos. Admiral Moorer stated that this operation would be conducted in four phases and was designed to clean out the Tchepone area which is the critical LOC control point for the flow of enemy supplies into Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam. The operation would involve two ARVN division equivalents—the ARVN airborne division and the 1st ARVN Division from I Corps. The South Vietnamese strategic reserve, which normally consisted of the airborne division, would be reconstituted by a brigade of South Vietnamese marines now involved in the route 4 clearing operation, thus permitting the airborne division to be moved into I Corps for employment in Laos:

—Phase 1 would consist of preparatory operations during which the U.S. 5th Mechanized Brigade would attack west along Highway 9 in South Vietnam to secure the line of communications for the operation and to establish logistics and fire support bases along South Vietnam's border with Laos. An airhead would be established at Khe Sanh and U.S. heavy artillery would be placed along the border. Concurrently, South Vietnamese and U.S. forces would establish blocking positions south of the demilitarized zone.

—Phase 2 would consist of an assault into Tchepone and an overland attack by the 1st ARVN Division, west along route 9. The 1st Division would establish fire support bases north and south of route 9 and the river paralleling this route.

—Phase 3. Once route 9 was secure and the Tchepone airfield seized and secure, ARVN forces would commence probes out of Tchepone along key logistics routes in Laos.

—Phase 4. This phase involves optional courses of action which may or may not be undertaken, dependent on developments. The option for phase 4 would include an attack southwest from Tchepone through Base Area 611 and a link-up with separate ARVN forces attacking northwest from a position just east of Base Area 611 in South Vietnam.

Admiral Moorer stated that U.S. support for this operation would consist of logistics lift, tactical fighter, bomber and B-52 bomber support, helicopter evacuation, and gunship support. Phase 1 of the operation was to commence about January 30 with Phase 2 on or about the 7th or 8th of February.

Dr. Kissinger asked if it would be likely that the enemy would know that the ARVN were coming. Admiral Moorer answered that we had habitually attacked along route 9 in South Vietnam and it was likely that the Phase 1 operation would not stir too much concern. He stated that code names were being used which conformed to earlier Ashau Valley operations to insure that enemy forces would not pick up the fact of the pending operation.

Mr. Johnson noted that an attack on Tchepone was precisely what he had recommended in 1965 but that his recommendations had been overruled by estimates that six U.S. divisions were required for such an operation. He was now astounded that people believed it could be done with two ARVN divisions, even recognizing that the enemy had become much weaker in the interim. Mr. Packard stated that we estimated it could be done with good air support and because the enemy lacks our mobility and would have difficulty in reacting. Mr. Packard added that the operation should last several months. Mr. Johnson stated that there were many enemy close to the demilitarized zone who could reinforce.

Dr. Kissinger then asked whether or not it would be possible to compress the time between Phase 1 and Phase 2. Secretary Packard replied that this time was needed to open route 9 in South Vietnam and to be sure that it was in good trafficable condition. Admiral Moorer reiterated that since we had opened this route many times in the past it would merely look like a repeat operation and added that the enemy would have difficulty reacting very quickly.

Both Mr. Johnson and Mr. Packard stated that in this area it was probable that the enemy would have to stand and fight. Dr. Kissinger agreed and asked Admiral Moorer whether or not he thought adequate friendly forces were being employed. Admiral Moorer stated that he had discussed this issue in detail with General Abrams, General Lon and General Sutherland and that all were confident.

Dr. Kissinger asked whether three ARVN battalions would be able to hold Tchepone airfield. Admiral Moorer answered that the overall weight of preponderance in favor of the South Vietnamese would be three to one. Dr. Kissinger asked how long it would take for the overland elements to link up with the air assault elements at Tchepone, and Admiral Moorer replied that the link-up would be very quick since they were only moving some 35 kilometers.

Mr. Johnson then asked if the concept was to hold Tchepone during the entire period. Admiral Moorer stated that Tchepone would

serve as an airhead to support the overall operation in Laos but that operations would commence along the routes leading into and leaving Tchepone.

Mr. Johnson stated that he was somewhat surprised that Tchepone had been selected and wondered why an operation further south in Laos, farther from North Vietnamese reserves in North Vietnam, had not been selected. Admiral Moorer answered that a careful analysis had been made of all possibilities.

Dr. Kissinger then stated that the day's objective was to prepare a detailed check list of what preliminary actions had to be accomplished with respect to the operation. He stated that yesterday the President had approved the operation, as well as the provision of medical evacuation, helicopter logistics and gunship support, the utilization of heavy U.S. artillery in South Vietnam, as well as B-52 raids in Laos. The President had also approved a public line for the Chup operation. With respect to Tchepone operation the principals had suggested that a line be taken to the effect that ARVN forces were conducting a raid in force against enemy logistics installations in Laos.

Dr. Kissinger stated that it would be necessary now to prepare a detailed diplomatic scenario for both operations. With respect to Chup, this would be a minimal requirement which should involve being sure that Lon Nol was fully apprised of events. It was probable that an announcement from Saigon would be adequate. Admiral Moorer commented that Lon Nol would be in Saigon the following day and would undoubtedly be well briefed on the operation. Secretary Packard instructed Admiral Moorer to send General Abrams a message designed to insure that Lon Nol was aboard.

Mr. Johnson said that our public position on Chup should merely be a straightforward statement of the fact. He then asked when the Tchepone operation would occur and Admiral Moorer reiterated that Phase 2 would commence on approximately February 7 or 8. Secretary Packard noted that both the Chup and Tchepone operations were almost simultaneous, thus posing the enemy with maximum difficulty.

Mr. Johnson then asked who was aware of the Tchepone operation, emphasizing that the most careful public relations handling would have to be assured. He stated that it was probable that Souvanna would not be overly concerned if operations were conducted in areas outside of his control. Probably the best public line would be to say very little but in either event it was essential that the South Vietnamese, the Lao's and ourselves carefully coordinate on a public position.

Mr. Johnson asked if we should say something to Souvanna before the operation. Dr. Kissinger commented that he may actually prefer not to be put in a position of having to approve the operation, as was the case with Lon Nol on the Cambodian incursions. Mr. Johnson

stated that this was merely a question that had to be answered. In any event, he believed that the public relations posture was a crucial one and should involve:

—The public relations posture of the GVN.

—The development of an integrated public relations plan which had been carefully coordinated and agreed to by Souvanna.

Mr. Johnson continued that it is obvious that we would take much domestic flak because of the violation of Laotian neutrality. Secretary Packard proposed that a Task Force be formed to develop a public relations plan on a close hold basis.

Dr. Kissinger cautioned that the danger of leaks within our government was a serious one. Mr. Johnson stated that he would like to cut in Assistant Secretary Green and Ambassador Sullivan. Dr. Kissinger agreed that this was acceptable but emphasized that a specific list of those who are informed of the operation must be maintained by all departments and agencies. Mr. Johnson agreed and stated that the list should not be enlarged without the specific approval of the principals. Dr. Kissinger concurred and stated that he would provide participants with the NSC list which would be limited to General Haig and one other. Mr. Packard suggested that dissemination be withheld for another week. Dr. Kissinger agreed in general with the exception of Assistant Secretary Green and Ambassador Sullivan.

Dr. Kissinger then stated that the task at hand was to prepare a diplomatic scenario, a public relations game plan, and a plan for congressional liaison. The plan should include a precise listing of who does and says what.

Mr. Johnson stated that he believed that South Vietnam was the major problem. Dr. Kissinger stated that Ambassador Bunker would be in Washington on February 1 and asked if it might not be prudent to ask Ambassador Bruce to return also. Mr. Johnson suggested that Ambassador Bruce could be brought aboard at the time of the operation.

Dr. Kissinger asked General Cushman to prepare a CIA estimate of enemy, Chicom, Soviet and other pertinent worldwide reactions on the closest hold basis. He asked Mr. Johnson to have State prepare a contingency plan in the event of Chicom intervention and added that Mr. Johnson might want to include representation from Defense and NSC. Mr. Packard stated that he believed there was a possibility of stepped up North Vietnamese operations in Northern Laos.

Dr. Kissinger then asked Mr. Johnson to insure that a US/UN posture on the issue of the Geneva Accords was included in the diplomatic scenario and that the question of contacts with other governments such as the British and the organization of the United Nations also was included. He emphasized that U.S. actions should be held to a minimum so as to give the operation a regional flavor.

Mr. Kissinger suggested that the group meet again on Thursday,³ that they bring their access lists, and that action be withheld in assigning tasks within the bureaucracy until that time. Mr. Johnson agreed but stated that he would, of course, discuss the operation with Assistant Secretary Green and Ambassador Sullivan.

³ January 21.

106. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, January 20, 1971.

SUBJECT

POW Developments

I thought you would be interested in being brought up to date on recent developments concerning the POW issue.

In the Paris Meetings on January 14, Ambassador Bruce hit hard on the POWs.² Pointing to South Vietnam's release of sick and wounded POWs and its openness to international inspection, he focussed on North Vietnam's long standing and unconscionable violation of its legal and moral obligations in withholding information on the POWs. The Ambassador called particular attention to the other side's record on POWs held in South Vietnam and Laos, where North Vietnam has not even provided a simple list; has not allowed any flow of mail, any inspections or any releases of sick and wounded; and where it continues to hold completely innocent civilians including missionaries, medical personnel and journalists.

Ambassador Bruce then attempted to provide the North Vietnamese with an updated list of 1,534 American servicemen missing

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 121, Vietnam Subject Files, Viet (POW), Vol. II. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen." The President wrote the following note at the bottom of the first page: "Keep it up—We need a good story once every week or 10 days."

² For the text of Bruce's statement at the 99th plenary session on Vietnam held at Paris, January 14, see Department of State *Bulletin*, February 1, 1971, pp. 136–137.

in action, but this was rejected outright by the other side. Ambassadors Bruce and Habib therefore read for the record the names of the 156 additional Americans missing since a similar list had been provided to the North Vietnamese at Paris in December 1969. Ambassador Lam followed with details of the Government of Vietnam's repatriation of 50 North Vietnamese POWs scheduled for the Tet holiday on January 24.³

At the January 14 meeting, Xuan Thuy and Madame Binh of North Vietnam and the PRG presented their standard line calling for total U.S. withdrawal, an end to Vietnamization, and the end of Southeast Asia airstrikes. Thuy's liaison officers refused to accept the new list. Madame Binh asked whether the U.S. representative had come to Paris to negotiate or as a public entertainer. Ambassador Bruce reacted vigorously both during and after the meeting to Madame Binh's statement and characterized the other side's rejection as reflecting a very cynical attitude.

U.S. media comment on January 15th gave considerable play to the Paris meeting. The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, and the CBS TV Evening News (Roger Mudd) reported that the Communist negotiators had refused to accept a new list of American military men missing in Southeast Asia and that Madame Binh ridiculed Ambassador Bruce as "a public amuser." The CBS *World News Roundup* on the morning of January 15 carried a broadcast from Paris by Peter Kalischer which stressed Ambassador Bruce's handling of the POW issue.

Ambassador Bruce and the Mission in Saigon suggest that future efforts might focus on the good performance record of the South Vietnamese, and on the particularly bad record of the North Vietnamese in Laos and South Vietnam. In addition, the Mission suggests that our side might (1) challenge the PRG to issue a list of POWs held by the Viet Cong; (2) request the return of remains of deceased POWs; (3) offer specific data concerning circumstances of the loss of those missing in action; (4) suggest alternate parties in addition to International Red Cross to inspect POW camps in North Vietnam; and (5) offer to supply medicine, food, etc. to U.S. POWs via third parties. These approaches and others will be considered by a small interagency/NSC "ad hoc" POW committee which has been set up with General Hughes as Chairman to provide guidance on POWs and to stimulate wider press attention.

³ South Vietnam released 37 sick and wounded prisoners that the ICRC had determined were willing to be repatriated to the North on January 24. While the North accepted them, they made no public comment. (Vernon Davis, *The Long Road Home: U.S. Prisoner of War Policy and Planning in Southeast Asia*, pp. 268–270)

Current third party support for the U.S. POW effort includes moves by the British, the ICRC, the Vatican, Sweden and Poland, who have all indicated some interest in appealing to the North Vietnamese on behalf of U.S. prisoners of war in Indochina. The degree of support and interest ranges from the British, who are asking Moscow and the other countries concerned to intervene unilaterally with Hanoi and define POWs in such a way that it includes all U.S. and Free World prisoners captured everywhere in Indochina, to Sweden which is skeptical about the possibility of getting positive responses from the DRV.

107. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, January 21, 1971.

SUBJECT

Sihanoukville Intelligence Failure

Attached is the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board's report² on the failure of the intelligence community to properly assess the flow of enemy material through Sihanoukville. Examination of Cambodian records has revealed that during the years 1966–69 Chinese Communist deliveries to Cambodia of military supplies for VC/NVA forces totalled about 22,000 tons and that the Sihanoukville route accounted for the bulk of supplies used by enemy forces in southern II, III and IV Corps. Although MACV and CINCPAC made a correct assessment, CIA, State and DIA held that the primary means of resupplying these enemy forces was the overland route through Laos (DIA's views began to diverge from CIA's in 1969).

After examining the problem, the FIAB has concluded that:

—The inaccurate assessment of Sihanoukville's importance to the Communist war effort was a major U.S. intelligence failure which re-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 208, Agency Files, CIA, Vol. IV. Secret; Sensitive; Contains Codeword Material. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² Attached but not printed is a November 25 letter from Anderson to Nixon forwarding the report and related documents.

sulted from deficiencies in both intelligence collection and analysis. The failure was all the more pronounced because of the unusual attention and high priority given to the subject by government policymakers.

—The Communist logistics network was so extensive that with greater collection efforts the discrepancy would probably have been detected sooner. Among those factors contributing to collection failures were: great caution resulting from concern about the effect that a compromise might have on relations with Cambodia, the absence of an official American mission in Cambodia, and the lack of close coordination between collectors and analysts, even within CIA headquarters.

—Deficiencies in intelligence analysis were an even greater cause of the failure. Washington analysts lacked objectivity. Having espoused an initially erroneous position on Sihanoukville's role in the war effort, they persisted in minimizing the steadily increasing mass of circumstantial evidence which contradicted their original assessments.

- If available data had been properly evaluated, the true role of Sihanoukville could have been ascertained.

- The Washington community and MACV started from the same information base. However, analysts in Washington insisted on conclusive evidence and were reluctant to view evidence in the aggregate. There was an apparent preoccupation with discrediting MACV estimates.

- The Ho Chi Minh Trail was emphasized and other potential supply routes discounted. It was believed that the Communists didn't need other routes and couldn't depend on Cambodia.

—Concerning our overall knowledge of enemy logistics, intelligence on these capabilities should be regarded as tenuous in the absence of communications intelligence or photographic evidence.

On the basis of his examination of the Sihanoukville case, the Chairman of the FIAB recommends that the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency be directed to make appropriate personnel changes³ in the Agency. As you know, I have been working with Director Helms on appropriate personnel changes in the Agency. In my

³ Nixon underlined "directed to make appropriate personnel changes," drew a line to the bottom of the page, and wrote the following: "K—give me a report on these changes—I want a real shakeup in C.I.A. not just symbolism." The word "real" is underlined three times. Helms detailed the personnel changes he planned to make in a December 7 letter to Kissinger. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 208, Agency Files, CIA, Vol. IV) In a February 6 memorandum to Brown, Halperin wrote that Haig was monitoring the changes and that they would be done over the next year. (Ibid.)

discussions, I will also include appropriate reassignment of personnel associated with this intelligence failure. I expect to have a complete report in the near future on changes which Director Helms is initiating.

108. Minutes of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, January 21, 1971, 4 p.m.

SUBJECT

Laos

PARTICIPATION

The meeting was restricted to principals only.

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	State
CIA	U. Alexis Johnson
Richard Helms	Defense
JCS	David Packard
Admiral Thomas Moorer	NSC
	Alexander M. Haig

Dr. Kissinger opened the meeting by expressing his concern about the story written by Getler referring to Thai SGU's in Laos.² Under Secretary Johnson theorized that the story might have come from the field where some of the wounded Thais had been exposed to the press. Secretary Packard then interjected that he was particularly concerned because Secretary Laird's trip report made mention of the highly sensitive operation in Tchepone and therefore he was taking special precautions with respect to the circulation of that report and asked the principals to do the same.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. It ended at 5:23 p.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76, Record of Schedule)

² In an article entitled, "U.S.-Backed Thai Buildup Seen in Laos," Michael Getler wrote that Thailand was sending "special guerilla troops into the southern Laos Panhandle for the first time as part of a U.S.-backed plan to harass expanding Communist supply lines." He attributed the information to Congressional sources. (*The Washington Post*, January 21, 1971, p. A1)

Continuing the discussion of the Getler article, Mr. Helms asked who Getler was and with whom he generally worked. Admiral Moorer answered that Getler was normally active in the Pentagon. Dr. Kissinger remarked that Getler had been the source of several serious leaks, including the 5000 tanks in Europe and a recent decision memorandum. Mr. Helms asked whether or not the Thai SGU issue had been discussed in any other forum. Dr. Kissinger replied that he was not aware that it had been and that this made the leak all the more serious.

Under Secretary Johnson then stated that, although he would defer to Mr. Helms, he believed that the leaking situation was just about the same as it has always been. He noted that the Cuba situation in 1962 was the best handled, security-wise, but even then Mr. Reston had the story a full three days before the fact. Fortunately, however, he had not used it. Dr. Kissinger asked whether or not Mr. Johnson was referring to the Bay of Pigs operation. Under Secretary Johnson said he was referring to the 1962 missile crisis.

Dr. Kissinger said that the Cambodia operation last spring had been held very well, but that it was difficult with the kind of coordination being attempted to insure on this operation that security was held properly. Dr. Kissinger stressed that it was most important to maintain security on Phase One of the Tchepone operation at least until the fire bases had been established.

Dr. Kissinger then asked Admiral Moorer whether or not he had received confirmation that coordination had been effected with the Cambodians on the Chup situation. Admiral Moorer answered that he had sent a list of five questions to General Abrams but had not yet received a reply. Admiral Moorer explained that General Abrams was probably awaiting the completion of the meeting between Lon Nol and President Thieu. He assumed that at this meeting Thieu would discuss with Lon Nol the forthcoming campaign along Route 7.

Dr. Kissinger asked all of the participants to bring to the next meeting of the WSAG their list of individuals who would have access to the plans.

Dr. Kissinger then turned to the diplomatic scenario covering the Chup and Tchepone operations. The first problem mentioned was that of U.S. handling of Souvanna. Should we tell him before the act and, if so, when would we tell him and in what form? One the pro side, Dr. Kissinger indicated that if he was not told, Souvanna could make the point publicly that he was unaware. If he was told, we risked the fact that he would blow it and deprive us of the option. He might condemn the operation or the very fact of having told him might weaken his position domestically and subject him to unacceptable pressures within Laos itself. Dr. Kissinger stated that the diplomatic scenario should list specifically the

pros and cons of handling Souvanna. If the answer was yes then we should be specific in the plan as to how and when this should be done.

Under Secretary Johnson stated that he was convinced that we would have to go to Souvanna before the operation and prior to the time that we must make a go or no-go decision. Dr. Kissinger then asked what the latest acceptable date could be for a go, no-go decision assuming that Souvanna was opposed. Admiral Moorer replied that he believed that 48 hours before commencement of Phase Two would be adequate.

Dr. Kissinger then stated that the way we described the Tchepone operation would be important. In the meeting with the President on Wednesday it had been suggested that we describe it as a raid of limited duration.³ Deputy Secretary of Defense Packard said that he agreed with Dr. Kissinger and asked Mr. Helms to comment. Mr. Helms stated that he agreed with the general line on the description of the operation but confirmed that he also agreed with Under Secretary Johnson that we must approach Souvanna on the operation and in sufficient time to insure that we could safely call the operation off.

Dr. Kissinger asked how much lead time he felt was involved. Mr. Helms indicated that four days before the commencement of Phase Two was probably needed. Secretary Packard commented that this meant sometime around February 1. On the other hand, Secretary Packard stated, it meant it would be better to do it before we started to move the ARVN troops from III to I Corps since this would become known to Souvanna. Under Secretary Johnson indicated that he agreed, for not only were we going to be moving ARVN forces into I Corps but we would be attacking west along Route 9 with U.S. forces during Phase One. Admiral Moorer noted that the operations would start on about the 30th. Dr. Kissinger stated that this was a healthy aspect of Phase One since once these forces started moving, the enemy would be inclined to slow the movement of logistics and personnel through the trail.

Dr. Kissinger then asked Secretary Johnson whether or not he thought we should notify Souvanna before Phase One began. Under Secretary Johnson stated that he felt that this should be done. Mr. Helms agreed that this should be done since once Phase One started the whole operation would acquire a momentum of its own which would suggest possible operations in Laos. Therefore, Souvanna must have some notification. Secretary Johnson said that he was concerned about the mo-

³ In the meeting described here, which took place on January 18, a Monday, one of the subjects the meeting focused on was the nature of the Tchepone operation. See Document 104.

mentum issue and asked whether it wouldn't be wise to determine Souvanna's attitude even before commencement of Phase One. Dr. Kissinger replied that the President would never make a decision on Phase Two simply as a result of the momentum that had been generated because of the initiation of Phase One. It should be recognized that Hanoi might start yelling during Phase One and therefore the question was whether Souvanna would be better off not knowing about Phase One so that he could take an uninformed attitude. In any event it would be difficult to do Phase Two if Souvanna objected. For this reason, it might be best to go as late as possible. If we went early, security would become a problem and Souvanna would find himself implicated. If we went late, we were then confronted with a momentum problem generated by Phase One itself.

Mr. Helms then stated that he thought Souvanna would lie even if we went to him earlier. Therefore, he would favor going to Souvanna early because the key issue was having Souvanna with us and not alienating him at the outset.

Dr. Kissinger again asked what specifically would be gained by going to Souvanna then rather than waiting until three days before Phase Two. Secretary Packard answered that an early approach would give us time to regroup and call off the operation gracefully. Secretary Johnson indicated that he was concerned that we not go any further without at least starting a dialogue with Souvanna since we would be flying blind. Furthermore, he continued that Souvanna would become increasingly wary. Secretary Johnson stated further that the first conversations with Souvanna could be general in nature and sufficiently vague to avoid getting locked into a protagonist posture. Obviously Souvanna would be interested in the size of the operation, its duration and depth.

Mr. Helms stated that he agreed completely that we should go to Souvanna now. Admiral Moorer pointed out that he also agreed since at that time Souvanna was already greatly concerned about the operations of the North Vietnamese 312th Division in Laos and that this might be helpful to Souvanna's attitude.

Dr. Kissinger then asked who would be with Souvanna when Ambassador Godley made the approach. Secretary Johnson answered that it would probably be Sisouk. Dr. Kissinger then asked whether or not an approach to Souvanna now would not be immediately translated to Hanoi. Dr. Kissinger agreed that Souvanna must know before a final decision was made, but suggested that Godley be queried immediately and his views obtained on the timing for an approach.

Secretary Johnson stated that perhaps we should send someone from MACV to brief Ambassador Godley on the operation and ask Godley to tell us immediately what he thinks about an approach. Admiral Moorer stated that Ambassador Godley was pretty well acquainted with the operation already and that he had talked to him

during his visit to Southeast Asia. He added that Godley seemed to be most concerned about the duration of the operation and how it would impact on Souvanna. Secretary Johnson stated that Godley had informed him the previous week that the southern rightists in Laos were already plotting with the Vietnamese to move into a four-power alliance against the Communists at the expense of Souvanna.

Mr. Helms stated that he believed we should move with Phase One and not permit it to be stopped because of the impact it would have. Secretary Johnson stated that he knew that Ambassador Godley favored the operation. Dr. Kissinger then theorized that perhaps the best bet was to tell Souvanna very little since in the worst situation it could blow and therefore we did not want to be in the position of having given too much.

Secretary Packard stated that he agreed that we should give a little bit at the first contact with Souvanna and then provide more details later on as we assessed his attitude. Secretary Johnson commented that it was important in any event that we give Souvanna at least enough so that he would get a grasp of the scope of the operation. Admiral Moorer stated, "I think that if we contact Godley now and ask his views he will come back and inform us that Souvanna is only worried about the duration of the operation."

Dr. Kissinger then stated that the group should not set a deadline for itself. He noted that the CIA assessment on the value of the Tchepone operation indicated that this could be a decisive element and that it was important that if the operation were to go that it last at least two months.⁴ Secretary Johnson stated that he had drafted a message to Bunker outlining some of the considerations.⁵ He noted that he had used the term "a raid in force for a limited duration" designed to disrupt the flow of supplies, equipment and personnel and to insure the safety and security of U.S. forces remaining in South Vietnam, emphasizing, of course, that U.S. forces were threatened by the enemy's ability to reestablish sanctuaries along the borders of South Vietnam.

Secretary Johnson commented further that the main problem with the Tchepone operation would be an explanation of why we had not

⁴ The intelligence assessment prepared by the CIA on January 21 is summarized in Document 111.

⁵ Rogers forwarded a draft of the telegram to Nixon under a January 21 covering memorandum, noting that as a result of a "long, careful briefing at the Pentagon yesterday, it is my opinion that it is necessary to get Thieu's full support and Souvanna's quiet acquiescence if we are to avoid major diplomatic and domestic problems." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 83, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol I)

done it before. Admiral Moorer stated that to this time the South Vietnamese had not been strong enough to conduct an operation of this type. Dr. Kissinger commented that the fact that the enemy's infiltration had been so high this season also justified the action. It was important that we interdict this movement now at the crucial point in the withdrawal of our own forces. Secretary Johnson added that not only could it be portrayed as a help to Vietnamization but it also would buy time for the Cambodians to build their strength and also inhibit the reestablishment of the sanctuaries in Cambodia. Secretary Packard remarked that he had some doubt that we should play very heavily on the Cambodian issue.

Returning to the question of contacts with Souvanna, Dr. Kissinger commented that the best bet was to deal with him privately and not to put him on a public frying pan. Admiral Moorer asked whether or not State was preparing guidance for Godley. Secretary Johnson confirmed that a message was being drafted and that two things were important with respect to the approach to Souvanna. The first was what to tell him privately, and the second was what he said publicly about what he had been told privately. Secretary Johnson also pointed out that he had been preparing a message for Bunker so that positions could be completely coordinated with President Thieu. He also agreed to eliminate reference to Cambodia.

Admiral Moorer asked if it would not be better to go to Godley first, find out Souvanna's attitude and then go to Thieu. Secretary Johnson answered that the Tet holidays would make this difficult and tricky timing since it would be hard to get to Thieu once the holiday began.

Dr. Kissinger stated that the President had asked that we try to handle Souvanna on the Cambodia model; that is, much the way we had done with Lon Nol. The President at this point was very anxious that the Tchepone operation go and he wanted the attitude taken interdepartmentally that we should remove the obstacles to the operation and not generate a process which would build pitfalls and difficulties. Dr. Kissinger suggested that the group prepare a message immediately to Ambassador Godley conveying the idea that it had been concluded that we must bring Souvanna in early and requesting Godley's views on how best this could be done and what should be said. Based on this reply we could then go to Bunker and ask him to contact Thieu, after Tet. If it was found that Ambassador Godley needed more information and a second approach to Souvanna, then they would have to go back to Thieu again. Secretary Johnson indicated that he felt this was the best way of handling it. Dr. Kissinger reiterated that Souvanna was the key issue, and not Thieu.

Under Secretary Johnson again asked whether or not the momentum that we were generating would set us on a course from which we

could not recoil. Dr. Kissinger stated that this would never be a controlling factor with President Nixon, and that unless the President decided to go against Souvanna, an affirmative decision would not be based on momentum alone.

Dr. Kissinger then asked Under Secretary Johnson to prepare the message in such a way that we would approach Godley first and obtain his views and asked that Secretary Johnson clear such a cable with the participants in the WSAG.⁶

Secretary Johnson then told the group that he was concerned that we had accepted the conclusion that we could handle Laos like Cambodia. He pointed out that Laos was an entirely different situation, emphasizing that it was held together by mirrors. Laos had represented an extremely delicate political balance for an extended period. The operation proposed against Tchepone would change the status quo in Laos drastically. The other side could claim that we had upset the balance in Laos and that therefore they could feel less constrained to unleash the 312th North Vietnamese Division. Furthermore, the Chinese Communists would start making noises and we could have a major donneybrook develop in Southeast Asia. For all of these reasons, it was essential to consider carefully the implications of the Tchepone operation. All of this underlined the need to approach Souvanna before going much further.

Dr. Kissinger asked whether or not Hanoi could accept another major campaign in Laos on top of all the other obligations they had already assumed. Secretary Packard stated that this was not necessarily the key question since we must be ready in any event. Dr. Kissinger agreed. Secretary Johnson stated that the North Vietnamese could also move strenuously into Southern Laos or the Chinese Communists could attack into Northern Laos.

Secretary Packard stated that we were also now finally achieving great success in our interdiction campaign against rolling stock. In the last days we had been getting 100 trucks per day. For this reason the value of the operation and its importance might be somewhat lessened. Dr. Kissinger stated that the counter-argument is that the Tchepone operation would add further to the enemy's problems. Admiral Moorer

⁶ Telegram 12344 to Vientiane, January 23, included a general description of the operation and asked for Godley's recommendations on how to approach Souvanna: specifically, whether it would be best to inform him in advance and acknowledge his acquiescence publicly; inform him but not acknowledge this fact publicly, thus allowing him to preserve his public neutrality; or present him with a *fait accompli*. The telegram was sent "Nodis/Ashau," a special handling requirement directing that only Bunker, Godley, and their senior communications officers could receive it. (Ibid., Box 80, Vietnam Subject Files, Ops in Laos and Cambodia, Vol. II)

added that Tchepone is the hub and nerve center of their entire logistic system.

Secretary Johnson stated that he agreed that the operation was militarily advantageous but that the political risks were overriding and for this reason he was strongly opposed to it. Secretary Packard stated that, on balance, he favored the operation and Mr. Helms confirmed that he, too, favored the operation. Admiral Moorer stated that he was only in favor of the operation because it would be the last solid opportunity for the U.S. to permit the South Vietnamese to operate outside of South Vietnam. During the next year our withdrawal rates would make this kind of flexibility impossible.

Secretary Johnson stated that he could see some gains in the operation, but subjectively, he was very skeptical. Dr. Kissinger asked Secretary Johnson to elaborate on his political fears. Secretary Johnson stated that the operation could cause Souvanna to resign or cause his government to collapse. If this were to occur we would be in worse shape in Laos.

Secretary Packard asked what the impact of Souvanna's fall would be? Secretary Johnson replied that this would cause the southerners to split off from Souvanna. Dr. Kissinger asked if this would be a great disaster. Secretary Johnson answered that it would result in the loss of Vientiane and possibly a greater portion of northern and central Laos. Secretary Packard stated that this might be so and that the enemy could also make this happen by attacking in strength in northern Laos, but on balance it appeared that their plates were pretty full at that time. Mr. Helms commented that he was rather confident that the enemy would fight strongly in Tchepone and elsewhere. Admiral Moorer stated that that was his assessment also and that there we would have a great advantage where we could inflict casualties with our air.

Dr. Kissinger then stated that it was important that the diplomatic scenario be completed and that there was only about a week's time to get the issues resolved. He pointed out that it was necessary to have a fully integrated diplomatic public affairs and Congressional scenario. Secretary Packard commented that we should not permit the public relations people to start discussing this issue until the very last minute. Dr. Kissinger agreed and asked Secretary Johnson to prepare the scenario to include who says what to whom, and assuming that Souvanna gives an affirmative response.⁷

⁷ Johnson sent an initial draft of the diplomatic, Congressional, and public relations scenario to Kissinger under a covering memorandum, January 22. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 15-1, US/NIXON)

Secretary Johnson said it was probable that we would be attacked in the U.N. by the Soviets if we moved without Souvanna's endorsement. Furthermore, in any event they might take the Geneva Accords issue to the United Nations.

Dr. Kissinger remarked that that was precisely why we should prepare our plans with the assumption that we had Souvanna on board.

Secretary Packard stated that it was equally important that an effective and frank Congressional liaison plan be prepared. Secretary Johnson stated that this would be one of the greatest problems since Senator Javits has also raised the issue of U.S. support for our operations in Laos and he did so in front of Senators Stennis and Ellender who seemed to agree with Javits that it would not be wise. Then there was the problem of Cooper–Church and the strong feelings that would come from the Foreign Relations Committee. Dr. Kissinger interjected he couldn't understand the difficulty since Cooper told the President that he could bomb anywhere as long as ground troops were not involved.

Secretary Johnson then commented that within the confines of the WSAG forum he would like to make the comment that the problem along Route 4 and the credibility problem in Cambodia was one of our own making. It looked to the Congress and to the press as though they had had to drag out of us what we were doing. It would have been far better had we come clean initially and called a spade a spade. Dr. Kissinger stated that he agreed completely with that assessment, and then asked what the group's view was on briefing Senators on the operation. Secretary Johnson stated that he believed that this was precisely what we should do and that we should let General Vogt and Marshall Green inform the Senators and the Congressmen exactly what we were doing. He stated that it was somewhat disconcerting to read Ron Ziegler's briefing last week on Cambodia and then to read Secretary Laird's the following day. He did not understand what Secretary Laird was driving at with respect to the Nixon Doctrine and airpower.

Dr. Kissinger then said that he would advise the group shortly of the next WSAG meeting, and the meeting was adjourned.

109. Memorandum for the President's File by the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)¹

Washington, January 26, 1971.

SUBJECT

Meeting with the President, Dr. Kissinger, Admiral Moorer and General Haig on Tuesday, January 26, 1971 in the Oval Office, 12:25 p.m.–1:03 p.m.

The President opened the meeting by informing the group that he wished to meet with them to review the military aspects of the operation scheduled to be conducted against Tchepone in Laos. Admiral Moorer stated that he would conduct the briefing in such a way as to flesh out the detail of the broad, outlined plan discussed with the President earlier. Admiral Moorer used a large map, covering North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. He described the Tchepone operation as taking place in four phases:

Phase I, which would be initiated on the night of January 30–31, involved internal movements within South Vietnam and included the movement of the ARVN First Airborne Division and a regiment of ARVN marines from III Corps to the I Corps area. It involved the following additional steps:

—The insertion of intelligence teams into the Tchepone area to acquire last-minute military intelligence.

—The movement of the Fifth Mechanized U.S. Brigade west along Route 9 to Khe Sanh; repair of the road and its bridges; and the establishment of fire bases along the Laotian border.

—The provision of U.S. and ARVN blocking positions south along the DMZ.

Phase II would consist of the following actions:

—The crossing of the Laotian border by some 10,000 men of the First ARVN Division.

—ARVN ground elements would attack due west along Route 9 setting up flank security as they proceeded.

—When they reached a point about midway between the border and Tchepone, the First ARVN Airborne Division would launch a brigade air mobile operation to seize the Tchepone airfield.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 84, Memoranda for the President, Beginning January 24, 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information.

—Phase II would be concluded with the consolidation and improvement of the Tchepone airfield and the defenses around Tchepone.

Phase III would involve maintaining the security of the Tchepone airfield and the movement of ARVN forces in a 360° arc into blocking positions along the routes surrounding Tchepone. It would also involve search and destroy operations designed to disrupt the infrastructure and the logistics lines and to discover caches in the area.

Phase IV of the operation involved the withdrawal of ARVN forces to the east along Route 9 or an option of swinging south to Base Area 611.

Admiral Moorer then presented what he considered to be the major advantages of the Tchepone operation. These included:

—Tchepone was the control center for the three exit points from North Vietnam through which all logistics flow to Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam.

—It was the headquarters for all logistics operations in Laos.

—South of Tchepone, the logistics route split into two or three segments and, therefore, it was the focal point and the convergence point for North Vietnam's logistics effort. The main thrust of the movement of supplies south of Tchepone was the old trail bordering the South Vietnamese border and the newly developed complex along Highway 23 through Attoupeu and down the Mekong corridor.

—An operation in Tchepone should totally disrupt all logistical activities of the North Vietnamese for the period of time needed to repair the damage done by South Vietnamese forces. This could represent as much as a year's gain overall.

—If the enemy fights, and it is likely that he will, U.S. air power and fire power should inflict heavy casualties which will be difficult to replace. The enemy's lack of mobility should enable us to isolate the battlefield and insure a South Vietnamese victory.

—The current flow of materiel versus manpower through the Ho Chi Minh Trail confirms that the large bulk of supplies and materiel will be in the Tchepone area during the period of the ARVN attack. (Admiral Moorer noted that 14,000 tons had moved through Tchepone just last week.)

—The large number of laborers and transporters in the area confirmed that the North Vietnamese use a system of off-loading their trucks at the end of each leg of a logistics journey. This occurs in the Tchepone area where the trucks are off-loaded just before dawn, then reloaded just after dark for movement south. This means that large amounts of supplies are also needed just to sustain the transport and laboring forces involved. For this reason, there should be considerable numbers of stockpiles and rolling stock which could be affected by the

operation. Admiral Moorer emphasized that the North Vietnamese are now concentrating on supplies rather than manpower down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. This had been necessary because of the Cambodian operations last year and it was normal for the enemy to shove supplies down and then have his forces move into them. At the present time, there were forces in the south but a serious shortage of supplies. Admiral Moorer noted that enemy troops in the supply system were carrying weapons which was a departure from past practices. He noted also that an all-out, full-fledged effort was under way to rebuild the enemy's logistics system and to get supplies down into Cambodia and South Vietnam.

—Disruption of the Tchepone supply complex would increase the chances of the survival of the Lon Nol regime.

—It would drastically delay the infiltration timetable for personnel, facilitate Vietnamization in South Vietnam, and insure our ability to continue with a rapid rate of withdrawal of U.S. forces.

In summary, Admiral Moorer stated that the operation was militarily feasible, would get decisive results, and convey a signal to the North Vietnamese of the great risks they have accepted by extending themselves into Laos and Cambodia.

Admiral Moorer then turned to a detailed analysis of the enemy's ability to reinforce his units in the Tchepone area. He pointed out that habitually the enemy moved his troops in this area at night because of heavy air attack. If the enemy could be panicked into initiating daytime troop movements to reinforce the Tchepone area, the damage which could be inflicted by our air would be greatly magnified. Admiral Moorer emphasized again that he did not believe that ARVN forces could be overcome due to their own mobility and the U.S. firepower which would be provided.

The President then stated that the key element in the Tchepone operation was the fact that the U.S. is not directly involved on the ground but would be limited to fire support through artillery from South Vietnam and the full range of air support involved. At the same time, the President stated, there would be charges of U.S. efforts to widen the war through an invasion of Laos. The President commented that it would be most helpful if we could use South Vietnamese assets and helicopters to lift their troops rather than having to rely on U.S. forces.

Admiral Moorer replied that he had investigated this possibility twice with General Abrams and he had also looked into the possibility of allowing the South Vietnamese to handle the Route 4 operation themselves. General Abrams had made every effort to convince the South Vietnamese to support themselves, but they just did not have sufficient capability to lift a brigade into Tchepone and to provide for the great array of logistics requirements involved. Admiral Moorer

stated he would again investigate the possibility, but that he was confident we would have to lift the ARVN forces and provide for their logistics support as well as their medical evacuation. He stated that, in the plan, the 101st Airborne Division's helicopter assets would be involved.

Dr. Kissinger asked Admiral Moorer if it would be possible to modify the Tchepone plan in such a way that it would involve only an overland operation. Admiral Moorer stated that he had discussed this possibility with I Corps ARVN Commander, General Lam, but that General Lam felt that the shock action of the air mobile operation was essential to its success.

The President asked Admiral Moorer to study the operation again in terms of a plan using less U.S. airlift, so that we would not be open to the charge of lifting South Vietnamese troops into Laos. The President added that the main problem at this point, however, was the attitude of Souvanna.

Dr. Kissinger stated that we had had a reply to our initial approach and that it was somewhat worrisome and vacillating.² Dr. Kissinger continued that Souvanna indicated that he would have great difficulty with an operation that would extend more than three weeks, and that we had verified that three weeks was not nearly enough to make the operation cost effective.³ Dr. Kissinger added that Souvanna's concerns might be overriding, but that in any event the operation would have to extend for at least four to six to eight weeks. Only in this way could we pose the enemy with a most serious problem of tying up his logistics for the remainder of the dry season, and forcing him during 1972 to rebuild his whole logistics infrastructure. Thus, in effect, we could be buying a full year of additional security at a time when our strength would be minimized and the greatest risks to our overall Vietnamiza-

² The final instructions along with the text of a message to Souvanna Phouma were sent to Godley in telegram 13112 to Vientiane, January 25. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 80, Vietnam Subject Files, Ops in Laos and Cambodia, Vol. II) Godley met with Souvanna on January 26 and reported on the meeting in telegram 470 from Vientiane. (Ibid., Box 83, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. I) In a memorandum to Kissinger, January 25, responding to Kissinger's request, Helms wrote that Souvanna had a good record on being able to keep a secret, but there was no record on how he would handle confidentiality if he was opposed to an activity. (Ibid.)

³ In telegram 470 from Vientiane, Godley also reported that Souvanna studied the message and maps of the Tchepone area minutely, suggesting other options for the site of the operation, but Godley pointed out the deficiencies of each. Souvanna noted that he would have to protest the operation and ask the South Vietnamese forces to leave, but that if it could be kept secret for a week, he could give the South Vietnamese around 2 weeks to withdraw, thus allowing 3 to 4 weeks for the operation. He asked Godley to query Washington about the possibility of attacking the border area between Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia instead and the total time needed for the Tchepone operation. He added that he would "sleep on" the information.

tion program would exist. For this reason, Dr. Kissinger stated it appeared that the Tchepone operation should be extended for at least a two-month period.

The President asked again about the specific attitude of Souvanna. Dr. Kissinger confirmed that the initial approach made by Godley was somewhat tenuous and that new instructions were being prepared for Godley in a more explicit tone.⁴ Admiral Moorer commented that he could not quite understand how we could accept the double standard, permitting the North Vietnamese to occupy and use Laos and be so self-conscious about ARVN efforts in Laos to prevent this. Dr. Kissinger stated that this was the point that we had made to Souvanna and that we could live with the position that he might take, demanding the withdrawal of all foreign forces from his territory.

The President then remarked that while he agreed with Admiral Moorer that we were the victims of a double standard, the situation in Laos was somewhat different due to the emotional problems domestically. It was important that Souvanna take a position which would not be damaging to our domestic attitude here. He asked Admiral Moorer and Dr. Kissinger to look into whether or not the operation could be conducted without U.S. troop lift and he also asked that alternate plans be considered which would not involve Laos.⁵

The President then asked Admiral Moorer to touch upon the current state of planning for the Chup operation. Admiral Moorer replied that the Chup operation had been fully prepared and was ready for launching on February 4th. The President noted that this meant that both Chup and Tchepone would take place simultaneously but with independent command and control. Admiral Moorer confirmed that this was the case and that General Tri would be in command of the Chup operation and that General Lam would be in command of the Tchepone operation from I Corps.

The President asked what the benefits of the Chup operation would be. Admiral Moorer answered that the enemy had been attempting to rebuild the sanctuaries in the Chup area and that the North Vietnamese and VC 7th, 9th and 5th Divisions were in the area. Dr. Kissinger interjected that there would actually be some advantage of going through with the Phase I of the Tchepone operation since it would serve as a feint to reinforce success of the Chup plan. Admiral Moorer

⁴ See footnote 5, Document 110.

⁵ The request was sent in JCS message 2075 to CINCPAC, January 26. It reads as follows: "Although we have plowed this ground before, I have been once again asked if the ARVN can conduct this operation without the use of US helicopters. Request your comments." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 83, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. I)

continued that during last Spring's Cambodian operation the enemy withdrew to the north and west and that at least two full enemy divisions and an artillery brigade, as well as the 274 and 272 Regiments of the 9th Division, were in the area. He pointed out that there had been some recent movements of the 9th VC Division towards the Fishhook in an effort to get back into the III Corps area of South Vietnam.

The President stated that he agreed completely with the operation and that he hoped there would be some contact, with a sizable South Vietnamese victory and that this success would help Thieu in his election and would add to the momentum of the improvement of the South Vietnamese forces. Dr. Kissinger noted that the Chup operation would blunt the enemy offensive this dry season in southern and central Cambodia. The President asked if it would relieve the pressure on Phnom Penh. Admiral Moorer answered that unquestionably the operation would do so for this was the area from which had come the logistics support and troop elements now moving around Phnom Penh. Admiral Moorer added that the attack on Phnom Penh airfield probably came from a sapper unit attached to an artillery brigade located in Chup.⁶

Admiral Moorer continued describing the operation by indicating that the Chup operation would involve a thrust west along Highway 7 to Kompong Cham. The highway would then be turned over to the Cambodians and the South Vietnamese would continue to attack north through the Chup Plantation to the elbow of the Mekong River. This would be followed by an attack south of Route 7 to link up with the other ARVN forces which were attacking west along Highway 1. The operation would take approximately three months.

The President stated that the operation appeared to be a sound one and that it would obviously take the pressure off Phnom Penh and continue to prevent additional pressures from developing against the III and IV Corps of South Vietnam.

The President then turned to General Haig and asked what he thought of the attitude in Phnom Penh as a result of the enemy pressure, and especially as a result of the attack on the airfield. General Haig stated that he was certain that the recent enemy activity in and around Phnom Penh had added greatly to the anxiety of the Cambo-

⁶ In a memorandum to Nixon, January 22, Kissinger reported on the "well planned and coordinated effort to destroy military facilities" at the Pochentong airport near Phnom Penh by VC and NVA forces early that morning, Cambodia time. (Ibid., Box 511, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. XI) In a second memorandum to Nixon, January 22, Kissinger added that there were no U.S. casualties, but a number of Cambodian victims, and almost the entire Cambodian Air Force was lost. Nixon wrote on the bottom: "Let's see whether a S.V. Nameese Commando squad could not be put together to hit an airport near Hanoi." Haig noted on the memorandum that the Department of Defense had been notified. (Ibid.)

dians but that he could see no signs that morale or resolve was cracking. He stated that in many respects the attack on the airfield might have had some therapeutic value in shaking the complacency which General Haig had noted in the Cambodian armed forces during his recent visit to Phnom Penh.

Admiral Moorer stated that, in his view, if the go-ahead was not given for the Phase II of the Tchepone operation, we would still reap some tremendous psychological benefit as a result of having conducted Phase I. He also suggested that the enemy would likely concentrate his defenses in the Tchepone area and that massive employment of U.S. air could result in increasing casualties to the enemy.

The President stated that he was in favor of conducting the Tchepone operations but that Souvanna's attitude would be pivotal. He reiterated that he would like to have a thorough investigation made of whether or not the operation could be conducted without U.S. airlift.

Admiral Moorer commented that he, too, strongly favored the Tchepone operation and noted that they had considered an alternative plan of attacking across northern Cambodia to Stung Treng in an effort to cut the Mekong logistics corridor south of Attopeu. Investigation, however, suggested that this was not nearly as effective an operation as Tchepone since there were no concentrations of enemy supplies and since the area was open, permitting the enemy to shift and move his forces so as to avoid contact. Furthermore, a thrust of this kind into northern Cambodia might merely force the enemy to shift his supply routes further west without seriously disrupting them. Admiral Moorer added that he would now also look at the Chup operation with the view towards attacking farther north beyond the elbow of the Mekong as far as the Stung Treng area.

The President stated that in his view the enemy's situation had deteriorated badly and that he may not be as tough as he had been in earlier months. He noted that the enemy had been taking a beating as the ARVN grew stronger. This Spring's campaign could have a major impact.

The President then inquired about additional bombing of the Laotian choke points and other air plans which he had requested. Admiral Moorer stated that two sets of plans had been developed. The first provided for heavy air strikes in the Panhandle against the entry points in North Vietnam—the three major pass areas. The second series of attacks provided for naval bombardment against the coastal logistics facilities along the east coast of North Vietnam. Admiral Moorer added that they had also developed a plan for coastal PTF raids against North Vietnam employing South Vietnamese crews and involving the use of the 40mm cannons on the PTFs. Finally, Admiral Moorer said that the JCS had prepared plans for attacks on POL storage areas along the east coast of North Vietnam.

The President stated that he would like to see all these plans, provided they involved South Vietnamese troops only. He pointed out that it would be of great benefit to escalate raids against the north and to do so simultaneously with the Chup and, if it was approved, the Tchep-one operation. All this would convey to Hanoi that the ARVN was growing stronger, that in the future they could expect attacks against their homeland. Dr. Kissinger then commented that Mr. Laird had all the plans discussed by Admiral Moorer but that they had not been forwarded to the White House.

The President asked whether or not it would be possible for the South Vietnamese to conduct a raid against the North Vietnamese airport in the Hanoi area. Admiral Moorer answered that they had looked into this very carefully with General Abrams but that the consensus of professional opinion was that such a plan would not be feasible, due to the strong enemy defenses in the area.

The President thanked Admiral Moorer for his presentation and the meeting was adjourned.

110. Minutes of a Meeting of the Senior Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, January 26, 1971, 4:40 p.m.

SUBJECT

Southeast Asia Dry Season Campaign

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

John N. Irwin II

Defense

David Packard

CIA

Richard Helms

JCS

Admiral Thomas Moorer

NSC Staff

Brig. Gen. Alexander M. Haig

Colonel Richard T. Kennedy

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. According to Kissinger's Record of Schedule, the meeting ended at 5:35 p.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76)

Dr. Kissinger: We will have a meeting of the principals with the President as soon as possible. It will be arranged when they are available. I understand that Secretaries Laird and Rogers and Admiral Moorer will be tied up on the Hill for the next day or two.

Mr. Irwin: We have to set the record on Cambodia clear. General Vogt said that some helicopters landed on the Route 4 operations. Senator Cooper objected to the report that 10 helicopters landed. General Vogt said that this was against policy. We have to be careful to keep our options for landing of helicopters in the Chup operations.

Admiral Moorer: Some marine choppers did land deliberately.

Dr. Kissinger: I think it is terrible that we have to apologize for helping a country which is helping itself. We all should use the information on the small number of U.S. air sorties that are actually involved.

Mr. Packard: On these upcoming operations, I think we should tell Congress in advance. We should brief selected members and the press in a straightforward way.

Admiral Moorer: We plan to do this. Abrams says he should brief selected reporters 24 hours in advance and be sure they understand the full details of just what is involved.

Dr. Kissinger: Why should we tell them before the operation begins? It seems to me it would be preferable to brief them as close to the actual time the operation starts as possible. We should level with them but just before it begins, not 24 hours in advance.

Mr. Packard: There is a great advantage in getting a story out right the first time. If they don't know the facts, the first stories they file could be pretty far from the mark. I will take another look at the timing.

Mr. Helms: We want to be sure from the beginning that the press understands what we are doing and what the limits are.

Dr. Kissinger: Do all agree that this briefing should be done and we will consult again as to the timing? (All agreed.)

Mr. Packard: I suggest that for Chup we follow the general press guidance draft which I have prepared for Tchepone (a copy is attached).² I recommend that Dan Henkin and Friedheim prepare detailed plans for both operations.

² Attached but not printed is an undated, untitled, 2-page paper with general public relations guidance and a draft statement for General Abrams to make after operations began. The statement did not name the country in which the operations were being conducted, but noted that the purpose was to "help thwart the enemy's movement of men and materiel down the Ho Chi Minh Trail." It noted also that the RVNAF was receiving air and logistics assistance from U.S. forces, including U.S. artillery fire from South Vietnam, but that no U.S. combat troops were participating in the operation.

Dr. Kissinger: I would prefer that we limit their participation now only to Chup until the principals have met on the Tchepone operation.

Mr. Packard: I am concerned about what we say when troops begin to move on Phase 1 of Tchepone.

Dr. Kissinger: (To Mr. Packard) Dave, would you please do up a public affairs scenario by tomorrow. (To Mr. Irwin) Jack, would you check again to see if anyone else needs to be notified on the diplomatic side. Should we tell Souvanna about the Chup operation? Do we need separate Congressional consultations? I think we should consider telling Congress 24 hours in advance.

Mr. Packard: We should brief a selected group of Congressmen in advance. I will prepare a full scenario for this.

Dr. Kissinger: We briefed the President at noon on the Tchepone operation.³ The President wanted to see if we could cut the requirements for U.S. airlift. He has no objection to all of the other air support. The President assumes that he can stop the operation up to 48 hours before H-hour. He wants to go ahead with Phase 1. The principals will get a chance to discuss this with the President. I think we should lay on heavy air attacks in the area in any event, both B-52 and TAC.

Mr. Packard: I agree.

Admiral Moorer: We're doing about 350 sorties a day in the area now. We would just shift our targets and probably could increase the sortie rate some up to around 400. As soon as the troop movements start in Phase 1, we will step up the air.

Dr. Kissinger: Concerning the reply to Godley's cable,⁴ I talked to Secretary Rogers and the President about it. The President thinks we should tell Godley to go back to Souvanna.

Mr. Irwin: Secretary Rogers wants the President to see the draft reply.⁵

Dr. Kissinger: Of course.

Mr. Packard: I think we should say something to the effect that it would be desirable to stay in the area for the entire dry season but that the forces could leave earlier if necessary.

Dr. Kissinger: What is the minimum time we expect will be necessary.

³ See Document 109.

⁴ For a summary, see footnote 3, Document 109.

⁵ The draft telegram to Vientiane is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. The approved version was sent as telegram 13902 to Vientiane, January 26. (Ibid., Box 80, Vietnam Subject Files, Ops in Laos and Cambodia, Vol. II)

Mr. Helms: Yes that is the question. What are we asking Souvanna to accept? How long a period will they have to remain?

Dr. Kissinger: Why don't we say a minimum of six weeks and perhaps longer.

Mr. Packard: We could leave off then "the entire dry season".⁶

Mr. Irwin: What do we say here in answer to queries from either the press or Congress? Four months? Or to the end of the dry season?

Admiral Moorer: We can't be that specific.

Dr. Kissinger: I agree with Jack. We will take the heat whether we initially say it is for a short period or a longer one. When we brief the Congress, we should say it will be for a minimum of six weeks but that it may be desirable to remain for the whole dry season. We will evaluate the situation as we go along. But we don't necessarily have to tell Souvanna this now.

Mr. Packard: In paragraph 5 of the draft cable, why do we tell Souvanna that this gives us pause. Why don't we just say that the matter is being given careful consideration.⁷

Dr. Kissinger: Why do we tell him that we are giving him an official reaction.

Mr. Helms: Souvanna made three propositions. Do we want to keep any of these open? How about his tri-border area suggestion? Do we want to eliminate this in his mind now?

Admiral Moorer: I think we ought to tell him that we looked at the other suggestions but that Tchepone is the preferable course. At the end of paragraph 3 of the cable we could say that we considered these other alternatives including the tri-border operation very carefully but the Tchepone plan offers the greatest military benefit.⁸

⁶ In paragraph 4 of the draft, the Department asked Godley to inform Souvanna that the RVNAF "would expect to stay in place during the entire dry season." Telegram 13902 reads, "they would expect to stay in place during much of the dry season."

⁷ The draft reads, "The serious objections Souvanna appears to have had to the proposal in your initial discussion with him naturally give us pause," and instructed Godley to say that he did not yet have an official reaction. Telegram 13902 reads, "The objections Souvanna appears to have had to the proposal in your initial discussion with him naturally are being given careful consideration," and left off the clause indicating that Washington had not reacted. In its place, the final draft instructed Godley to ask Souvanna that if he insisted on protesting the ARVN operation he should also protest the presence of North Vietnamese troops in Laos.

⁸ That language was included in telegram 13902.

Mr. Helms: We are dropping the last sentence (all agreed that it should be dropped).⁹ We are trying to find out the depth of Souvanna's feelings.

Dr. Kissinger: Why not say in paragraph 3 that you should inform him at the next meeting, which we hope will be soonest. (All agree.)¹⁰

Dr. Kissinger: How about instructions to Bunker to give him the state of play? Should he tell Thieu—I realize Thieu is not available for the next day or so. (All agree that Bunker should be informed on the state of play but that he should not tell Thieu until the next round.)

Dr. Kissinger: We will need a public posture on troop movements and Phase 1.

Mr. Packard: I will give you a recommendation.

Dr. Kissinger: What about Alex Johnson's scenario for Tchepone?¹¹ (All indicated a preference for Mr. Packard's general plan. All agree that the Presidential involvement proposed in the Johnson scenario was undesirable.)

Mr. Irwin: I will do a new scenario based upon Alex Johnson's outline and David Packard's plan.

Dr. Kissinger: Good, I think we should have that for our next meeting.

Mr. Irwin: In drafting it, I am concerned about the reasons why we would do this. As I understand it, we saw a high infiltration rate late in 1970 and the effect of this is what we are concerned about. But the situation is improving by all accounts in South Vietnam and the infiltration rate was down in January.

Dr. Kissinger: We cannot make a recommendation whether we should or should not carry out the operation. It is our job to plan on the assumption that the operation will be conducted. The principals and the President will discuss the issue of whether we should or should not go through with it. The basic rationale rests on the CIA assessment.¹² If the operation is conducted, it would block the North Viet-

⁹ The last sentence in paragraph 3 of the draft, which was dropped from telegram 13902, reads: "We wish to avoid any possible suggestion that we are engaging in duplicity in our relationship with him."

¹⁰ That language was included in telegram 13902. Haig also sent a backchannel message to Godley, January 26, in which he noted that instructions were being sent through normal channels, but that the President asked him to conduct his discussions in a way most likely to gain Souvanna's acquiescence, particularly in regard to the duration of the operation. The message was attached to a note from Haig to Karamessines, January 26. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 83, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. I)

¹¹ See footnote 7, Document 108.

¹² See Document 111.

name from launching a major offensive until the end of the dry season of 1972. They could not recover from the effects until then. That means that we would gain an extra dry season to continue our Vietnamization program and protect our withdrawals.

Admiral Moorer: This will be the last time that the South Vietnamese will be able to mount this kind of an operation. Our forces will have been drawn down to the point that we will be unable to take over the security mission in South Vietnam to release South Vietnamese forces for this kind of operation outside.

Mr. Irwin: The Congressional reaction to this will be strongly negative.¹³

¹³ In his January 26 diary entry, Haldeman wrote that Kissinger had spoken with him about the operation and believed that if it were successful it would end the war by totally demolishing the enemy's capability. Haldeman was concerned, though, about whether it would be worth the public and Congressional outrage over the operation. He noted that there was an alternative that might be more acceptable domestically: there were indications that the enemy had learned about the operation and that enemy troops were massing to counterattack, which presented an excellent target for an air operation that could prove just as effective as the Laos plan. Either plan, Kissinger worried, might scuttle recent successes he had had in negotiations with the Soviets. (*The Haldeman Diaries*, p. 239)

111. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, January 26, 1971.

SUBJECT

CIA Analysis of Probable Reactions of Various Concerned Parties to Operations in Laos

Attached is a comprehensive assessment prepared by CIA on the Tchepone operation.² Some of its more significant findings are:

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 83, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. II. Top Secret; Sensitive. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² Attached is a memorandum from Helms to Kissinger, January 21, transmitting the attached analysis, neither printed.

—Tchepone is a significant logistics target which encompasses the major enemy Base Area 604 and houses Binh Tram 33,³ the principal logistics command for the war effort in Cambodia and South Vietnam.

—Tchepone is a difficult target because of high density of enemy security forces and it is probable that enemy caches in the area are widely dispersed.

—Maximum effects from the operation are influenced by timing in that the bulk of supplies in the Tchepone area will move south in the latter parts of the dry season. The optimum time for ground attacks in the Tchepone area appears to be in mid and late February. Benefits increase in proportion to the duration of time friendly forces remain in Laos.

Probable North Vietnamese Reactions

—The enemy probably expects an attack on their logistics complexes and has postured his troops accordingly.

—The enemy will probably stand and fight once they accept that a sustained operation in the Tchepone area is underway.

—Enemy counteractions could also include attacks against the DMZ, Northern Laos or seizure of the Mekong River towns in Laos.

—Political reactions might include a cessation of the Paris Talks.

Soviet and Chinese Reactions

—The operation would be a matter of deep concern to both the Soviets and Chinese who would recognize it as a major threat to the Communist structure and organizations essential to the conduct of Communist operations in Cambodia and South Vietnam.

—Soviet reactions would probably be largely in the propaganda area.

—Chicom reactions would be more threatening and include stepped up shipments of arms, food, etc.; however, CIA doubts that Peking would intervene.

Lao Reactions

—Souvanna would be faced with his most serious political problem since 1962. If he supported the operation, probably he would risk losing the acquiescence of the Soviets, the North Vietnamese and even the Chinese Communists. If he opposed the ARVN operation, he would jeopardize his position with us and run the risk of setting off a coup by southern rightist leaders who are already pressing for closer military cooperation with South Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand.

³ Binh Tram 33 was a North Vietnamese military way station along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

—On balance, with proper timing and consultation, CIA believes that Souvanna can be brought along.

Thailand Reaction

—Positive.

Longer Term Communist Reaction

—CIA concludes that if the ARVN operation is marginally effective, it will encourage the Communists to continue their present course. If on the other hand the ARVN is highly successful, Hanoi will be faced with its most serious dilemma so far and may be encouraged to lash out in an escalatory fashion across the DMZ or in Northern Laos in an effort to incite strong domestic pressures in the U.S.

112. Memorandum for the President's File by the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)¹

Washington, January 27, 1971.

SUBJECT

Meeting of The President, Secretary of State Rogers, Secretary of Defense Laird, Director of CIA Helms, Chairman of JCS Moorer, Henry A. Kissinger and Alexander M. Haig in The Oval Office (12:15 p.m.–1:59 p.m.)²

In the absence of Secretary Laird who was testifying on the Hill, the President opened the meeting by informing the group that the initial part of the session would touch upon Secretary Rogers' testimony before the Foreign Relations Committee the following day.³ The

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 84, Memoranda for the President, Beginning January 24, 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information.

² In an undated memorandum to Nixon, Kissinger indicated that, as he and Nixon had discussed privately, the meeting was designed to do the following: give the participants an opportunity to vent their views without a decision being rendered and give everyone the impression that the operation was proceeding, including Phase 1 movements, and would continue with U.S. support. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 83, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. II)

³ Laird was appearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee. (*The New York Times*, January 28, 1971, p. 1) Rogers testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee the morning of January 28 on U.S. involvement in Cambodia. (Personal Papers of William P. Rogers, Appointment Books) See also *The New York Times*, January 29, 1971, p. 1.

President stated that during the morning breakfast Senator Cooper confirmed that he would support Secretary Rogers' testimony after it was given. Senator Mansfield was also included in the breakfast and appeared sympathetic.⁴

The President then asked Secretary Rogers what questions he expected would be raised, adding that our involvement in Cambodia would probably be the principal issue. Secretary Rogers stated that he had been working in some depth on the Cambodian issue but wanted to be sure that everyone was saying the same thing. For example, many had raised the issue of what the President said in June at the time we were leaving Cambodia.⁵ It was now evident that we had changed slightly and the question was whether or not we should admit to a change or insist that there had been none. The Secretary added that in his view the latter position was untenable.

The President stated that the simple fact was there had been and there would be no U.S. ground involvement in Cambodia. Our involvement had been totally with air power in various forms and it would continue in this way as long as the President considered such action was required to prevent the buildup of enemy sanctuaries in order to protect our remaining forces in South Vietnam. Our air involvement was not contrary to the will of the Congress and the Commander-in-Chief could not ignore a growing threat to the safety of our remaining troops.

Secretary Rogers confirmed that he would follow that line and that the group should decide on the precise parameters in their discussion so that all concerned could stick to the guidance agreed upon.

The President stated that U.S. spokesmen cannot adopt a misleading position. He suggested that Secretary Rogers recall for the Committee what had occurred over time. Our forces had been withdrawn. Casualties have been substantially reduced. Our purpose is not the defense of Cambodia but the U.S. program in Vietnam and the protection of U.S. forces involved in this program. On nine occasions the President had stated that if the enemy were to increase its activities and threaten our remaining forces that he would take necessary action. This is what had occurred in Cambodia. There had been no involvement of

⁴ According to the President's Daily Diary, the breakfast ran from 8:03 to 9:40 a.m. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files)

⁵ In his June 3, 1970, Address to the Nation on the Cambodian sanctuary operation, the President pledged that all U.S. air support, logistics, and military advisory personnel would be withdrawn from Cambodia by the end of the month and that only U.S. air interdiction missions against enemy troops and materiel to protect U.S. servicemen and South Vietnam would be flown thereafter. The text of the address is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pp. 476–480.

U.S. ground forces but as long as the enemy continued to build up, U.S. air power would be used.

Secretary Rogers responded that this line was inadequate and that it would not be accepted. During the Defense Appropriations hearings Senator Goldwater had stated that if the South Vietnamese invaded Laos they were perfectly capable of doing so, but it must be without U.S. help. Secretary Rogers continued that he had no difficulty with the decision to expand the use of U.S. air power but was having considerable difficulty with the explanation we were giving for this expansion. In this regard he insisted that the U.S. public must be satisfied.

At this point Secretary Laird joined the meeting and responded to Secretary Rogers to the effect that details on the kinds of U.S. air support involved were primarily semantic. We should just state that we are simply providing air support and avoid the issue of close air support versus interdiction. Secretary Rogers replied that, despite our best efforts, the issue would be raised, especially in light of the President's June report at the conclusion of our operations in Cambodia.⁶ Dr. Kissinger then read the precise language of the President's report which included the statement that there would be no U.S. air or logistic support provided to South Vietnamese forces as they remain in Cambodian sanctuaries following the withdrawal of U.S. forces.

Secretary Laird indicated that he would agree with stating that our policy had changed but not with respect to interdiction. Secretary Rogers commented that in referring to Cambodia we have maintained the basic line but that it was essential that we be somewhat more forthcoming, especially in view of the pending Chup operation. It was better, he added, to say there had been a slight modification.

The President instructed Secretary Rogers to say that the statement of June 30 was adhered to rigidly at the time; U.S. forces were withdrawn and South Vietnamese forces remained in Cambodia. Then on July 1, however, the President made a statement that he would employ U.S. air power to protect our forces.⁷ Therefore, it should be clear that the June statement was made in the context of the withdrawal of our forces and the continued activity of the South Vietnamese at the time.

Secretary Rogers stated that what the President had said was absolutely correct and it was in the June statement that the term interdiction was explained as well as a commitment made for no logistics or no close air support. Secretary Laird interjected that he interpreted interdiction in its broadest application and had from the beginning.

⁶ The President's report on the Cambodian operation was released on June 30 in San Clemente. The text is *ibid.*, pp. 529–541.

⁷ The President gave an interview on ABC television. See *ibid.*, pp. 543–559.

Secretary Rogers replied that while he understood this the real problem was that there would be no air support. Secretary Laird rebutted that he had always taken the position, and had done so again that morning, that close air support involved controllers on the ground and when this criteria was not met we did not have close air support. Secretary Rogers argued that this was merely a strawman. Opposition Senators would insist that to them interdiction meant bombing but not support for Cambodian ground forces. Again the question was one of semantics and we could fuzz it up. But it was not an easy thing to do.

The President reaffirmed that Secretary Rogers should emphasize that the U.S. Government adhered to the June 30 statement for the period involved but that now the situation has changed in the sense that the enemy was deeper in Cambodia and was re-establishing sanctuaries there. Secretary Rogers was correct but the statement was made under a different set of circumstances. We withdrew our forces as promised. We did not provide air support or logistical support to the ARVN. Now, as our force levels have continued to decrease, the enemy continues to build up and is attempting to re-establish the sanctuaries. We must react.

The President continued by instructing Secretary Rogers to tell the Senators that, as the President has said, the Commander-in-Chief must take the necessary steps to blunt the threat to the remaining U.S. forces. These steps are totally consistent with the consensus of the Congress. There are no ground forces or advisers involved and we will continue to adhere to this.

The President went on to indicate that, of course, the question of landing aircraft and putting communications teams on the ground presented a difficulty. We must decide what we should say about these items. Secretary Laird replied that he had made the following points that morning in testimony:

—U.S. delivery terms would be in country.

—we are providing over \$200 million worth of equipment and as Secretary of Defense he has the responsibility to have U.S. auditors on the ground. These men would not advise in the use of our equipment although no one could preclude the possibility that they might turn on a radio or point out how to assemble a specific piece of equipment.

Secretary Rogers asked how many auditors would be involved. Secretary Laird stated that at present the authorization was for sixteen. He had been asked that morning how many more would be authorized and had replied, “perhaps as many as thirty.” This figure would vary since we could use temporary duty personnel, as with the helicopter retrieval teams reported in the press that week.

The President stated that Secretary Rogers should assure the Congressmen that the President was well aware of the history of South Vietnam. He would not be sucked in and would watch escalatory in-

volvement very carefully. The President asked Secretary Laird how many delivery personnel would be required overall. Secretary Laird answered "110", but indicated that the majority of these would remain in South Vietnam and move in from time to time on temporary duty. Admiral Moorer added that the key issue was that these people were not advisers. They did not accompany tactical units to combat. They were not permanently located with these units.

Secretary Rogers retorted that the problem was that we have stated earlier that we would not put anyone in there. Now we were doing so. The President stressed that it was clear that these were not advisers in the South Vietnamese context and merely technicians involved in overseeing our assistance deliveries.

Secretary Laird then stated that he had just completed two hours testimony on this subject and felt that it was understood. Dr. Kissinger remarked that it was perfectly clear that we would not withdraw over 200,000 troops from South Vietnam just to be able to introduce 50 troops into Cambodia. The logic was absurd. Secretary Laird noted that he didn't even know where the figure 50 came from.

Secretary Rogers then commented that the problem was that we have not handled our information very well. On Route 4, for example, the Department of State was caught short and knew nothing of the operation. Had they known, it would have been easier to manage the press.

The President remarked that the important thing was not to say anything that would inhibit our future flexibility. Secretary Rogers commented that the problem was that we had already jumped to defend ourselves that week with respect to the landing of our personnel and now we were about to enter into an operation which would involve such landings. Dr. Kissinger interjected that Senator Cooper was aware of what we would do and would support us on it. Secretary Rogers stated that he understood this because he had been working on Senator Cooper for some time, but with the Laotian operation he had serious doubts that we could bring any of the doubters along.

Secretary Laird then remarked that the problem was that we had been doing this kind of support for over six months. With respect to the Route 4 operation he did not understand why State did not know what was going on since he had personally briefed the Secretary. Dr. Kissinger added that the Route 4 operation was briefed thoroughly in the WSAG prior to its execution.

The President stated that *with respect to* our future operations our problem was what was said now. Secretary Laird stated that his explanation on the landing of troops that week had been based on stories supported by photographs which had to be explained. Secretary Rogers said he agreed but this had painted us into a corner. That week's actions looked accidental. The next week's would be intentional.

Admiral Moorer then stated that what the U.S. was doing was merely exploiting its technological advantage to facilitate the withdrawal of U.S. forces. Secretary Rogers replied that he had no problem with what we were doing. It was the problem of what we had been saying we were doing with which he was wrestling. The issue now was whether we continued to obfuscate or whether we come clean.

The President stated that it was his policy to be perfectly frank about what we were doing. Secretary Rogers should pursue the following line:

—The President has kept every promise he has made. He had withdrawn our forces. He withdrew from Cambodia at the time he said he would and lived with the conditions he set for that withdrawal.

—The point, however, should also be made that he will deliver on threats which are ignored, starting with the November 3 speech in which it was made very clear that stepped up enemy activity would not be tolerated.⁸ Now it was evident that the enemy was again taking advantage of our withdrawals.

—We will use our air power to its fullest and we will continue to adhere to the prohibition on ground forces. But air power will be used to its fullest extent.

Secretary Rogers asked to what extent the President intended to use air power? Did the President mean we would land planes, provide logistics? What about the new reference to communications teams? Secretary Laird stated that these stories only referred to communications teams at the Embassy. Secretary Rogers retorted that this was not what Secretary Laird said and that he had inferred we could install communications teams. Secretary Laird stated, “Yes, I stated it was authorized under the law but I did not state that we would do so.”⁹

The President then asked Secretary Laird if he had any plans to bring in communications teams. Secretary Laird said, “Yes, to control the medical evacuation helicopters.” This was a difficult problem and it was necessary to support South Vietnam in getting their injured out if they were unable to do so themselves. To do this it would be necessary to have landing parties to control the helicopters on the ground. The President stressed that it was therefore absolutely necessary that we point out that the situation in Cambodia was different than it was during last spring. U.S. spokesmen should hide nothing. They should merely make the point that we would do everything necessary through air power.

⁸ The President’s November 3, 1969, speech on Vietnam is *ibid.*, 1969, pp. 901–909.

⁹ In response to a question during a news conference on January 20, Laird stated that he believed that the Congressional ban on ground combat troops in Cambodia did not preclude non-combat personnel such as military communications or hospital units. (*The New York Times*, January 21, p. 1)

Secretary Rogers said then they, of course, would go on to the issue of ground combat. They would ask for the definition of adviser and whether our people are advisers? Admiral Moorer repeated that this was a simple issue. An adviser is a U.S. soldier or officer who goes into combat with the friendly unit to advise him in terms of tactics and who advises him before and after the military operations. Dr. Kissinger then stated that when we refer to medical evacuation we mean helicopter evacuation.

The President stated that he wanted this clearly admitted so that there would be no charges that we have personnel sneaking around doing things that we have not admitted. This is what occurred during Laos when the statement was made that we had no combat personnel.¹⁰ Then one person surfaced and our credibility on the whole issue was challenged. Everything we are doing is to assist our withdrawal effort which will be down to 45,000–50,000 combat troops by May 1. Secretary Laird confirmed this figure, emphasizing that there would still be 284,000 U.S. forces but the large majority would not be in combat.

Secretary Rogers stated that he believed the Administration's case was a good one. The President affirmed that he had no concerns about doing what was programmed to be done.

Secretary Laird then commented that the only problem Secretary Rogers would have the next day would be from Symington, Church and Fulbright. They were furious about the assurances given by the President and Dr. Kissinger last June. They also insisted that they were told this at the White House. This was a problem because they would maintain that these assurances had led them to accept the new language for the Cooper–Church Amendment.¹¹ Secretary Rogers said that this was exactly the case. Fulbright and company maintained that they would have continued to fight for the original Cooper–Church language had it not been for these assurances.

The President asked Secretary Laird how he handled this issue. Secretary Laird stated that he had said it was done in terms of operations in the Cambodian sanctuaries at the time. Dr. Kissinger explained that in the backgrounder which Secretary Rogers referred to, he had made the point that there might be exceptions.

The President then asked when the Cooper–Church language had been amended. Secretary Laird answered that it had been modified around July 4 or 5. Therefore, the problem was a real one.

¹⁰ Nixon made the claim in his statement about the situation in Laos on March 6. The text is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pp. 244–249.

¹¹ A revised Cooper–Church amendment, P.L. 91–652, passed both houses of Congress on December 22, 1970, and was enacted on January 5, 1971. The amendment, attached to the Supplemental Foreign Assistance Act of 1970, prohibited the use of funds to finance the introduction of U.S. ground combat troops into Cambodia or to provide U.S. advisers to or for Cambodian military forces in Cambodia.

Secretary Rogers stated that this confirmed that we must go up and tell the Committee that we will land ARVN troops since Senator Stennis now thinks that we are only going to handle logistics. Secretary Laird remarked that he did not know where Stennis got this since he had informed him on both. Secretary Rogers noted that even Senator Stennis and Senator Goldwater would be troublesome. He again cited the Goldwater quote to the effect that the South Vietnamese can hit Laos but not with U.S. help.

The President stated that we should handle this openly and frankly. We have done exactly what we said we would do and now the situation had changed and there would be some slight increases. Secretary Rogers stated he would follow this line and that the statements made in June were made in the context of the time. We abided by that and now the situation had changed and we were slightly modifying those ground rules. If some people cared to interpret that as a basic change in policy that was alright.

The President asked Secretary Laird whether he would accept that phraseology. Secretary Laird agreed it was acceptable. The President then stated that if Secretary Rogers thought that the Committee would get into the Amendment issue, he could make the point that the President had always said he would use air power. Secretary Rogers responded that they had already gotten into it. It was likely that they would try to tie our hands again. Secretary Laird commented that we had until June before anything crystalized or funds were required.

The President stated that we should take the issue on frontally if that was the way it developed, since it was certain that we could win. Senator Cook had stated yesterday that all that really concerned the American people was ground troops.

Secretary Rogers then asked if it was really necessary for us to fly South Vietnamese troops in the Chup operation. Admiral Moorer answered that it was because of the size of the troop lift involved. Secretary Rogers stressed that in that case we had best tell Congress before it happened. Admiral Moorer stated that this was the plan.

Secretary Laird stated that the plan seemed to put too much emphasis at the Washington level and that much of the information should be divulged in the field. Secretary Rogers retorted that we could not do it all over there. The operation made great sense and we must tell the key Congressional leaders what we are doing. Secretary Laird agreed.

Secretary Rogers continued that the problem was not Fulbright who would oppose on any issue but that it was costly to lose Mansfield. The President agreed. Secretary Rogers stated that Mansfield was a decent performer; the same could not be said for Fulbright.

Secretary Laird stated that there should be no problem in getting complete acceptance of the Chup operation. Admiral Moorer added

that a complete briefing was being prepared. The President stated that it should be conveyed as something new. Secretary Laird remarked that perhaps we should seek Congressional approval for the operation. The President replied that this should not be necessary. We should merely state that this was what we are going to do in specific terms and confirm what we will not do.

Secretary Rogers told the group that General Vogt would accompany him in the morning.

The President then asked Secretary Rogers whether he thought we should take the Chup issue on frontally. The Secretary replied that he thought it was too late and that we should merely outline what we were going to do: bomb, fly supplies and men, and evacuate the wounded. Secretary Laird advised that Secretary Rogers should emphasize that we are only going to do what the South Vietnamese are unable to do. We have already trained 50 helicopter pilots more than the Vietnamization program called for. Next year they would also have additional choppers and larger birds.

The President asked if it was correct that they still don't have enough to do the operation. Secretary Laird replied that we have thousands of U.S. helicopters but that the ARVN was still limited. Secretary Laird stated that some were inferring that we were not giving the ARVN enough but that they should have plenty when the program was over. The President commented that it would have been much better had we had some decent conventional close support aircraft to give to the ARVN.

The President then asked Admiral Moorer to review the Tchepone operation for the group. Admiral Moorer described the four-phased operation. He pointed out that we had received intercepts yesterday which confirmed that Hanoi was aware of the general plan but not the timing. He stated that the intercepts were picked up by the Binh Tram logistics units and they were being carefully analyzed. In view of the enemy's knowledge of the operation Admiral Moorer had asked General Abrams if we should proceed. General Abrams had confirmed that he favored the operation provided full U.S. support was assured. Admiral Moorer stated that from the North Vietnamese reaction it was obvious they considered Tchepone to be a vital area. He stated that we had not had a set-piece battle since Tet in 1968. Since that time we had generally reacted to enemy attacks. This would probably be the first total defense effort we had seen since Tet.

Admiral Moorer then turned to Director Helms and asked him to say a word about the strategic importance of Tchepone. Mr. Helms described the enemy supply system as a rock passing through a sock and indicated that the Tchepone operation would take place just at the time that the rock had reached Tchepone.

Continuing his presentation, Admiral Moorer reported that General Abrams had confirmed that the operation could not be executed without U.S. support. General Abrams had also made the point that if the duration of the operation were brief then it would not be worth doing. If this were the case, General Abrams would propose not to move the ARVN forces into I Corps. Admiral Moorer stated that he in turn recommended that we avoid a decision now, proceed with moving the forces and see what happened next. The movement would affect North Vietnamese tactics. If they intended to fight it was obvious that Tchepone was crucial to them. Admiral Moorer stated he also was confident that the South Vietnamese, with our support, could do the job, especially since in recent contacts with the North Vietnamese the ARVN had been victorious.

The President stated that the whole issue involved what would be accomplished by the operation. It was probable that Vietnamization would succeed with or without the operation, but that the operation provided insurance for next year when our force levels would be down. Next year we would have forces in there but would be unable to conduct similar operations. The President stated that he recognized that we were on the horns of a dilemma; the Congress and country would be up in arms. On the other hand, if we could accept the heat now it would provide additional insurance for next year. If we did not, we were then postponing the heat until next year. If our goal is merely to withdraw that is one issue, but if our goal is to leave the South Vietnamese in such a way that they will have a chance for survival that is another issue.

The President continued by adding that Secretary Rogers was correct when he stated we were taking a beating now. However, most of those who were opposed to us had a vested interest in seeing that we fail and it was probable that we could do nothing that would bring them to our side. Others, however, such as Stennis must know what we are doing and we must deal with them in a forthright fashion.

Secretary Rogers then remarked that the whole issue in his view hinged on whether or not the operation could succeed. If it succeeded completely then it might be worth it. The Chup operation posed no problem but Laos was another question. If we come out of the operation without a clear success then we would have a serious problem. Another problem involved public support which was essential. Secretary Rogers also stressed that he did not agree with the connotation that the Laos operation was merely a raid. The public would want to know why we were disturbing the balance in Southeast Asia and we should inform them that it was a massive attack for extended duration. Secretary Rogers pointed out that our truck kills were way up and that they have increased from 100 a month to over 1000 a month. We

have made the point of this success. We have also made the point that we are interdicting the rivers and that infiltration is down this month.

Secretary Rogers went on to explain his reason for stating that the risks appear very high. The enemy had intelligence on our plans and we were now asking the South Vietnamese to conduct an operation that we refused to do in the past because we were not strong enough. If they were set back in the operation we would be giving up everything we had achieved. Thieu's future would be in doubt. Furthermore, the idea that the U.S. could rescue the operation was shakey and therefore it would serve as a defeat for both Vietnamization and for Thieu. The operation could unsettle the whole situation in Laos. The Thais would be uneasy and it would involve our SEATO units. Souvanna had expressed great doubts and would be unable even to talk to the King about the operation until January 31.¹² In the meantime, he would see the troop movements and assume that we were going despite his objections. He would have his own internal problems with the rightists in the south and might have to resign. Thieu in turn would have equal problems. Congress believed that we would not ever enter Laos and obtaining their support would be difficult. In Cambodia we at least had the support of the leaders. Souvanna's problem was a sharp one and he might not survive his tightly balanced position at home.

In sum, the Secretary asked, what was the advantage? If there were no doubt that it would succeed, that would be one thing, but the risks were very great in this operation and could have the effect of totally demoralizing the South Vietnamese and toppling Thieu in the election.

The President asked Admiral Moorer to assess the success of the operation. Admiral Moorer answered that in his view with U.S. support, ARVN mobility and U.S. fire power the ARVN could handle the situation from a military point of view. Admiral Moorer stated that this was General Abrams' view. The fact that there would be fighting was desirable. The enemy had put all of its acorns in Laos. If they fought enmasse our fire power would trip them sharply.

The President then asked Secretary Laird to comment. Secretary Laird stated that with the help of the Cambodian operation Vietnamization would succeed. The Vietnamization program was not linked to the operation in Laos. On the other hand, Laos might lessen our long-term requirements for supporting ARVN forces for the next three or four years. At the same time Vietnamization would work in

¹² In telegram 485 from Vientiane, January 27, Godley reported that Souvanna insisted that he would have to travel to Luang Prabang to consult with King Sisavang Vatthana. Godley recommended that the President prepare a message for Souvanna to deliver to the King on the operation. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 80, Vietnam Subject Files, Ops in Laos and Cambodia, Vol. II)

South Vietnam without this operation. So it should be decided whether or not the U.S. could support such a large ARVN force over three or four years.

Secretary Rogers then recommended that we continue with phase 1 since most of the enemy threat was in I Corps anyway and its reinforcement would be of some value. The President approved this course of action.

Secretary Laird continued that if I Corps was reinforced the enemy would concentrate to defend the Tchepone area and the enemy's uncertainty would be of benefit even if phase 2 was not implemented. In the meantime we should keep our option open on phase 2. The President agreed that this would be a significant signal to the other side.

Secretary Rogers then asked whether or not all of phase 1 operations involved only South Vietnamese totally. The President answered yes. Secretary Laird stated that 40% of the war was now in I Corps. Admiral Moorer remarked that we should lay on more B-52's and hit the enemy hard if they concentrated.

Dr. Kissinger cautioned that in his view and from the historic perspective, commanders in seeing an advantage coming normally piddle away their assets. We should be careful on the air to be sure that we do not step it up until the enemy masses and until we have hard intelligence.

Secretary Rogers then asked whether proceeding with phase 1 and then deciding to cancel phase 2 would weaken our overall posture. Admiral Moorer replied that he did not think so. Secretary Rogers remarked that it was obvious that surprise was no longer an element. Secretary Laird commented that we could do a lot of damage even in phase 1.

The President then directed that phase 1 be implemented, emphasizing that Chup was approved. He directed that the diplomatic dialogue with Souvanna continue since this was a crucial element. The President asked that more information be obtained on Thieu's attitude since it was essential that we not risk his October election. Defeats before an election could sometimes be fatal. This is what added to the attractiveness of the Chup operation. It could and should be built up as a South Vietnamese victory. It was also necessary that we prepare a public line and Congressional line for the phase 1 operation. In addition, it was important to tell the Congress exactly what we were doing in Cambodia. If they wanted to conclude that this was a modification, that was fine.

The President then indicated that the group should reconvene on Tuesday¹³ to consider the scenario for Congressional notification on the

¹³ February 2.

Chup operation. In this regard the President stated that we should be frank about what we are doing but avoid building a huge crisis. The important thing was not to acquire public support but to prevent a Congressional offensive against Presidential authority. Secretary Rogers added that it was important to sell Congress on the fact that the ARVN was doing the job and that we were only supplementing their efforts.

Secretary Laird noted that he started testimony before the Stennis Committee on Monday. The President stated that Tuesday would be February 2 and that in the interim the WSAG should work out the line, both public and Congressional, and decide who should say what.

Secretary Laird then continued that the very movement of our ARVN forces north would cause a stir. Dr. Kissinger stated that we should say nothing about troop movements. The President agreed, adding that we should have no comment on the movement of forces.

Secretary Rogers then asked whether Tuesday might be too late to decide on that issue. Admiral Moorer indicated that it was not. Secretary Rogers asked what the point of no return was on phase 2. Admiral Moorer replied that 48 hours would be needed and therefore they should have a decision by Thursday evening. The President directed that the situation be played out. Secretary Laird remarked that the enemy was bound to believe that we were going through Laos.

Admiral Moorer confirmed that he would instruct General Abrams to move out with phase 1 but would recall his execute authority for phase 2.¹⁴ Admiral Moorer added that General Abrams was getting goosey because of Souvanna's reaction. Also, Admiral Moorer stated that it was necessary that Bunker talk to Thieu about the Tchepone operation.

At this point the meeting concluded.

¹⁴ Moorer sent the instructions in JCS message 2225 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, January 28, noting that everyone at the meeting supported the Chup operation and that the President wanted to continue with Phase I of the Tchepone operation, but had not given his final order to proceed with the additional phases. (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330-76-207, Box 10, Laos 381)

113. Minutes of a Meeting of the Senior Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, January 28, 1971, 3:30 p.m.

SUBJECT

Southeast Asia Dry Season Campaign

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	JCS—Admiral Thomas Moorer
State—John N. Irwin II	NSC Staff
Defense—David Packard	Brig. Gen. Alexander M. Haig
CIA—Richard Helms	Colonel Richard T. Kennedy

[Omitted here is discussion of how and when to brief countries contributing troops to Vietnam, the press, and Congress about the operation into Laos.]

Mr. Helms: Will the North Vietnamese fight?

Admiral Moorer: There will be some fighting but we simply don't know how much the North Vietnamese will do or whether they will stand and fight for long.

Mr. Helms: We think they will fight but we can't tell how determined they will be.

Mr. Irwin: What risks are there for U.S. helicopters landing in the area? Will the area into which they go be secure?

Admiral Moorer: There won't be very much risk. The South Vietnamese have been operating in the area for some time along the road. I think we ought to settle what we will say on the Phase 1 operation. We need to get a public position on this.

Dr. Kissinger: Let's turn then to Phase 1 of the Tchepone operation.

Mr. Packard: I am troubled by this. There already has been some speculation and we can anticipate more.

Mr. Helms: Given the amount that the North Vietnamese know about it, a great many others must know too.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. It ended at 4:55 p.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76, Record of Schedule)

Mr. Packard: If we brief the press and Congress only on Phase 1 and the succeeding phases don't go, we can stay credible. But we can't brief on Phase 2 until there is a decision.

Dr. Kissinger: But we will have time between the time a decision is made and the start of Phase 2 if the decision is to go. We could brief with the literal truth before February 3.

Mr. Helms: I thought that we had a plan. We would say that we were moving troops north but we would say nothing about what might happen next. This would generate press speculation and in turn North Vietnamese reaction to protect its forces and installations. This would give us additional options on how to hit them.

Dr. Kissinger: The President sees it this way. I think then we just have to be prepared to take the heat for a week. The President wants no suggestion in our cables that we are not going ahead with the whole operation.

Mr. Irwin: What effect on the Tchepone public relations scenario will reaction to the Chup operation have?

Dr. Kissinger: We simply have to keep enigmatic. By all means there must be no leaking.

Mr. Irwin: As I understand it, nothing would be releasable under the plan proposed by General Abrams and Defense until the daily MACV embargo was lifted.

Dr. Kissinger: Do we all agree now that there will be no back-grounding by anyone on the Tchepone operation and that there can be no leaks of any kind. (All agree.)

Mr. Packard: Do we all agree that Dan Henkin should take the lead on the public relations aspects of the Chup and Phase 1 operations? (All agreed that Henkin should take the lead.) I recommend that there be a daily discussion between Henkin, McCloskey and Ziegler. (All agreed to this procedure.)

Dr. Kissinger: We want to keep the President out. If we are to go to Phase 2 we want to keep the President out of it.

Mr. Irwin: This includes the proposed TV speech. I oppose that.

Dr. Kissinger: I think we all do. This just tends to build it up. Am I correct that February 4 is D-day for Chup?

Admiral Moorer: Yes, and troop movements in Phase 1 Tchepone begin 30 January.

Dr. Kissinger: (To Admiral Moorer) Please make sure that General Abrams handles the press situation—keep the lower levels out of it. Can we send two separate messages to Abrams—one dealing with Chup and the other with Phase 1—rather than just a single message?

Mr. Packard: Yes I will do that. We will send them over for clearance.

Dr. Kissinger: As I understand it, on Phase 1 we will tell the press that troop movements are occurring to protect our position in the northern area of South Vietnam against an increased North Vietnamese threat and North Vietnamese movements in that area. As to Chup, as I understand it, we will give the press a briefing 24 hours in advance in a low key covering the scope of the operation and the nature and the extent of U.S. participation.

Mr. Packard: That is correct and on the Hill we will have General Vogt do this in a low key “door-to-door” on Chup.

Dr. Kissinger: But he will say nothing about Phase 1 on the Hill.

Mr. Irwin: If he did, he would have to face questions on later phases.

Dr. Kissinger: On the cables to Bunker² and Godley,³ the President has seen them. He recognizes that he has not made a decision. He will not accept that the operation has gone too far to call it off. But he wants all to believe that the operation is going and does not want to convey the opposite impression. He wants to change the thrust of the messages to be sure that they give the impression that we are going ahead.⁴

² In telegram 15224 to Saigon, January 28, the Department instructed Bunker to inform Thieu about the status of the discussions with Souvanna, including the decision to delay authorizing Phase II of Operation Ashau (the Tchepone operation) pending Souvanna's reaction, and to propose that the South Vietnamese begin troop redeployments to Military Region I in accordance with Phase I on the night of January 30–31. He was also to inform Thieu that the public response to inquiries about the redeployments would be that they were being made to establish a stronger defensive posture in light of increasing enemy concentrations in the Lao Panhandle and to interrupt the enemy's supply lines into South Vietnam. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 80, Vietnam Subject Files, Ops in Laos and Cambodia, Vol. II)

³ In telegram 15223 to Vientiane, January 28, the Department informed Godley that it did not want to involve Presidential authority in the discussions with the Lao on Operation Ashau. (Ibid.)

⁴ In telegram 1375 from Saigon, January 29, Bunker reported that he and Abrams met with Thieu and Vien, that Thieu agreed to go ahead with Phase I, and that GVN forces would move as planned. They also discussed Phase II. Abrams and Vien claimed it should take 1 to 2 days to reach Tchepone. Thieu thought the operation should take two divisions at least a month to complete, but Abrams felt that based on the experience of the Cambodian operation this estimate was an absolute minimum. Thieu claimed that the objective should be to clear up the area and stay in Tchepone to interdict the enemy, adding that after a month they could decide how many troops to withdraw. (Ibid.)

114. Editorial Note

On February 1, 1971, the senior members of the Washington Special Actions Group met from 11 a.m. to 12:47 p.m. for another extended discussion of press guidance for the Tchepone and Chup operations. The group felt that the press embargo on Phase I of Tchepone should be released before the Chup operation kicked off. Above all, embargos on both operations should not be released on the same day. Henry Kissinger emphasized that the Chup operation must be presented as an "ARVN Operation" designed "to keep the enemy from developing the capacity for a dry season offensive and to protect our withdrawal and Vietnamization." The group agreed. Kissinger then told the group that when the press asked if Souvanna Phouma was consulted about the Tchepone operation, the response, according to Ambassador Godley, should be "no comment" and when Souvanna asked for all foreign troops to leave Laos, Thieu would agree to withdraw if the North Vietnamese did. The group agreed. The meeting ended with discussion of Phase II of the Tchepone operation, including its potential for success and possible losses, especially of helicopters. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971)

115. Minutes of a Meeting of the Senior Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, February 2, 1971, 11:30 a.m.

SUBJECT

Southeast Asia Dry Season Campaign

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

NSC Staff

State

Brig. Gen. Alexander M. Haig

Marshall Green

Colonel Richard T. Kennedy

Defense

David Packard

CIA

Richard Helms

JCS

Admiral Thomas Moorer

[Omitted here is discussion of the diplomatic, Congressional, and public notification plan for both the Chup and Tchepone operations.]

Mr. Kissinger: [To Moorer] Would you brief us on the enemy order of battle?

Admiral Moorer: I briefed on the current situation in Phase I before you arrived. In summary, the operation is completely on schedule and there have been no U.S. casualties. The enemy can reinforce from North Vietnam, from his forces in South Vietnam, from the Tchepone area, and from elsewhere in Laos. They have moved some forces west to react against Silver Buckle operation. They have forces in the DMZ area and these could move toward Tchepone. They could move them back to the east. Forces stationed in Southern NVN and in the SVN II Corps area also could be brought up against the Route 9 attack.

Mr. Kissinger: Are they moving anything now?

Admiral Moorer: Yes, they have moved one regiment from Ban Karai pass area.

Mr. Kissinger: Then are they setting a trap to move in behind ARVN?

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. The meeting ended at 12:56 p.m. according to a chronology attached to a February 9 memorandum from Howe to Haig. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 84, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. IV) All brackets are in the original with the exception of those indicating omitted material.

Admiral Moorer: No, they haven't the mobility.

Mr. Packard: Maybe a month from now they could, but we could intercept them and hurt them badly.

Mr. Green: What kind of anti-aircraft will the choppers expect?

Admiral Moorer: We have information on where their defenses are. Most of the choppers will fly from Khe Sanh which will be a short flight. The defenses are on the high ground in the vicinity of major roads, truck park and supply areas. The choppers will avoid them and will use suppression fires.

Mr. Green: But we will expect some losses?

Admiral Moorer: Yes, some, but they will not be excessive.

Mr. Packard: I see that there has been a Soviet reaction to the embargo and the Washington statement.²

Mr. Kissinger: We are not eager to reassure the Russians.

Mr. Green: We can respond that it is outrageous that NVA is in South Laos with Soviet help.

Mr. Kissinger: Do we assume that even with the tipoffs they have had, the North Vietnamese can't get more forces into the area?

Admiral Moorer: No, they can't because of the lack of mobility and because there will be considerable confusion for some time as to what the operation intends.

Mr. Packard: It will not be an easy operation. The NVA have to stand and fight because this is a vital area to them. This is a strong argument for the operation.

Mr. Green: Unfortunately with the leaks that have occurred our punch is telegraphed.

Mr. Packard: The enemy knows what is going on without reading papers.

Mr. Green: We have to anticipate trouble though.

Mr. Packard: It is a disaster that we can't hold a thing like this. But this is no reason not to go ahead.

Admiral Moorer: If Abrams thought the operation was not prudent, he'd say so. He plans now to go on the 8th at 0800 AM Saigon Monday, 7:00 PM EST Sunday. He will embargo.

Mr. Kissinger: We should let Abrams release the news as planned.

² According to *The New York Times*, February 1, unnamed officials in Washington reported that a "major new allied operation involving thousands of South Vietnamese and American troops was underway in the northwest corner of South Vietnam." Both Soviet Premier Kosygin and Tass attacked the new military action as an "outrageous invasion" of southern Laos.

Mr. Packard: Yes. If we do Chup will look like diversion or this operation will be seen as a diversion for Chup.

Mr. Kissinger: Can't we get our people not to talk to newspapers on the scene?

Mr. Packard: We'll try but it is always difficult. The press is close by them in their base areas.

Mr. Helms: I wanted to mention a few facts on enemy logistics movements. The sharp increase in supply movement continued through January. It averaged 140 tons daily—twice the level of December. There will be a major supply movement campaign beginning about 28 January.

Mr. Kissinger: Do you conclude that most of the supplies are now south of Tchepone?

Mr. Helms: No. We estimate that the bulk will arrive in the Tchepone area about mid-February.

Admiral Moorer: There are heavy concentrations of supplies in Southern North Vietnam.

Mr. Helms: Intelligence supports the estimate that they are making an effort to move supplies south at the rate of at least 140 tons daily and that they will try to move even greater quantities with a surge effort.

Mr. Packard: We are getting some of the supplies by air strikes and they are consuming some.

Admiral Moorer: They are moving increasing quantities of ammo, spare parts, and supplies.

Mr. Kissinger: Up to 4500 tons a month?

Mr. Helms: Yes, we believe this estimate is not exaggerated.

Mr. Kissinger: Do we think we can block them and they can't go around to the west?

Mr. Helms: If we cut the road network it would stop most of the movement.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Green) Are you calling in the diplomatic side on the Chup operation tomorrow?

Mr. Green: Yes, I'll see the Australian, New Zealander, and the British.

Mr. Kissinger: I take it that we agree that we will let Defense handle Congress. I will have one of our Congressional people get in touch.

Admiral Moorer: Should I tell Abrams OK on the briefing plan? [All agree that Abrams should be given the OK.]

[Omitted here is additional discussion of the diplomatic, Congressional, and public notification plan for both the Chup and Tchepone operations.]

116. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, February 2, 1971.

SUBJECT

Meeting between the President, Secretary Rogers, Secretary Laird, Director of CIA Helms, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Moorer at 5:00 p.m., Tuesday, February 2, 1971 regarding Special Operations in Southeast Asia

Purpose of the Meeting

You are scheduled to meet with Secretary Rogers, Secretary Laird, CIA Director Helms, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Moorer and myself in your office at 5:00 p.m. today to discuss Phase II of the Tchepone operation.²

This meeting will give the small group of principals who have met with you earlier on this subject³ an opportunity to recap for you their views in a more limited forum, prior to the NSC meeting scheduled for 10:00 a.m. tomorrow morning.⁴

Conduct of the Meeting

In order to bring the participants abreast of the current battlefield situation and the status of Phase I of the Tchepone operation, as well as the timing and status of planning for the Chup operation, you may wish to call on Secretary Laird who, in turn, can ask Admiral Moorer to bring the group abreast of the last minute details on the Chup operation scheduled to commence at 4:00 a.m., 4 February, Saigon time (3:00 p.m., February 3, D.C. time). You should then ask Admiral Moorer, through Secretary Laird, to cover the current status of operations underway in Phase I of the Tchepone plan and the status of plans for the initiation of Phase II, to include current enemy order of battle.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 83, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. III. Top Secret; Sensitive. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² According to a chronology attached to a memorandum from Howe to Haig, February 9, the meeting took place from 5:02 to 7:25 p.m. (Ibid., Vol. IV) The President's Daily Diary indicates that it took place in the Oval Office, Kissinger arrived at 4:22 and left at 7:24 p.m., the remaining attendees arrived at 5:07 and left between 6:45 and 6:55 p.m., and Haig and Bunker also attended. (Ibid., White House Central Files) Kissinger wrote in *Ending the Vietnam War*, p. 198, "No new arguments emerged from the meeting." No other record of the meeting was found.

³ See Document 112.

⁴ The meeting was cancelled; see Document 117.

Following this, you may wish to ask Director Helms to briefly recap for the group the effect that Phase II will have on the North Vietnamese logistics effort in Southeast Asia.

Following this brief update, you may then wish to ask Secretary Rogers, Secretary Laird and Admiral Moorer for their views on whether or not an affirmative decision should be made with respect to Phase II. The pros and cons of Phase II are summarized on the handout I have already circulated to the participants (copy of handout at Tab A). The most significant related event that has occurred since our last discussion is the fact that surprise has been largely lost due to press speculation.

Talking Points

Inform group that you have convened this special meeting to provide an opportunity for a frank exchange of views on Phase II of the Tchepone operation prior to the meeting in the larger NSC forum tomorrow morning:

—Ask Secretary Laird to have the Chairman provide the group with a brief update on:

1. The status of planning and H-hour for the Chup operation.
2. The current military situation in I Corps on D+3 of Phase I. Include the current enemy order of battle.

—Following the update briefing by Secretary Laird and Admiral Moorer, you may wish to ask Director Helms to provide the group once more a brief assessment of the impact the operation will have on the North Vietnamese logistics effort in Southeast Asia, together with a brief wrapup of what he considers North Vietnamese, Chinese, Soviet and other pertinent international reactions might be.

—Ask Secretary Rogers to present his views on Souvanna's current attitude and his overall assessment of the pros and cons of proceeding with Phase II of the operation.

—Ask Secretary Laird to provide his assessment of the pros and cons of proceeding with Phase II.

—Ask Admiral Moorer for his views.

—Inform the group that you have given careful thought to the operation this past weekend and intend to convene a meeting of the principals of the NSC at 10:00 a.m. in the morning. The meeting will also include the Vice President, the Attorney General, Governor Connally, General Lincoln and Ambassador Bunker. In the interim, you wish to caution each of the participants that there has been too much laxity in security as manifested by several fairly precise news pieces today. Instruct the participants to insure a maximum degree of discipline within their departments and agencies.

Tab A

TCHEPONE

Pros

Cons

1. Domestic Reaction

By taking domestic heat now, will be buying insurance that withdrawals can be successfully continued at a time when militarily much more vulnerable.

U.S. involvement with air not ground combat troops. There are no legislative inhibitions to planned U.S. involvement. Operation consistent with Nixon Doctrine.

Segments of Congress and general public will be extremely critical of operation, calling it an expansion of war and violation of Laotian neutrality. U.S. support of ARVN required to insure success. U.S. helo losses in Laos will fuel domestic reaction.

2. Effect on Vietnamization

Vietnamization may work but failure to carry out operation will increase risks at precise time that withdrawals are accelerating substantially. Operation will lessen our long term requirements for supporting South Vietnamese forces for next 3 or 4 years.

Vietnamization will work without this operation.

3. Risks of Failure

Military Commanders are confident of success. Enemy has avoided standing and fighting in past. If they fight, our fire power advantage will be most effective and enemy losses substantially increased.

Failure could be totally demoralizing for SVN and topple Thieu in election.

Enemy aware of possibility of operation and has concentrated forces in area. Can inflict heavy casualties. We have turned down operation in past due to insufficient strength. ARVN may not have the capability to successfully accomplish this difficult operation.

4. Timing

Important to do now. This is last opportunity when U.S. will be able to give backup support. In next dry season, U.S. will not have forces available to free ARVN for major operations outside of SVN.

Enemy supplies are stacked up at Tchepone at this time. Will move South in near future.

Doing simultaneously with Chup creates possibility of disrupting Communist base structure and plans for at least a year.

5. Sufficiency of Military/Political Gains

Tchepone is a vital enemy supply hub. Enemy preparations to defend it are indicative of its strategic importance.

Will give South Vietnamese much greater chance for survival over the long term.

Enemy has been denied sea supply route; to deny land supply route from North Vietnam will have major consequences for enemy forces in SVN, Southern Laos and Cambodia.

ARVN confidence and pride will be greatly increased by success of operation conducted solely by their ground forces. Thieu's position for election will be enhanced.

Caches are strung out and will be difficult to locate.

Enemy may choose to move to West rather than fight, reducing military gain and increasing pressure on Souvanna.

6. U.S. Casualties

Although there will be some helo losses, it is estimated that casualties will not be increased measurably. It will guarantee less casualties over long term.

U.S. casualties might be increased substantially because of air support operations in heavily defended area, especially by anti-aircraft weapons.

If enemy crossed DMZ, U.S. defenders in blocking positions would suffer increased casualties.

7. Another Location

Military assessment has been made and operation in this location will have greatest impact on enemy.

Operations further south would be less risky since further from North Vietnamese reinforcements.

8. Credibility of U.S. Position Domestically

President has warned on numerous occasions that he would react to enemy increases in infiltration. It is the North Vietnamese who are operating in substantially increased numbers in Laos in violation of the Accords.

Congress believes neither U.S. nor South Vietnamese would move into Laos and violate neutrality.

9. Effect on Political/Military Situation in Laos

Souvanna expressed some initial reservations but after talking to King now in favor. Souvanna can call for withdrawal of *all* foreign forces, and may even state publicly that operation is necessary in light of NVN moves against Laos.

Souvanna feels it will tip balance in right direction. Enemy is already moving in Northern Laos. Enemy may not react in other locations.

Might put Souvanna in untenable political position. Would risk losing acquiescence of Soviets, North Vietnamese and Chinese.

Rightists who favor grouping of SVN, Cambodia, and Laos would be strengthened at Souvanna's expense.

Souvanna will have to call for withdrawal of U.S. forces.

Could unsettle whole fragile balance in Laos. Enemy might move in Northern Laos or move to the West.

10. Relations with Other Countries

Will increase credibility of U.S. strength and resolve.

CIA believes Soviet reactions would be largely propaganda. Chinese would be more threatening and give more supplies but it is doubtful they would intervene.

Our friends are anxious to have us out of Vietnam. This will increase the probability of a successful withdrawal. Thai reaction will probably be positive.

Might set back our relations with Soviets and Chinese.

Operation would be of deep concern to both Chinese and Soviets who would recognize it as major threat to Communist operations in Cambodia and South Vietnam.

Chinese might move into Laos.

Our allies, particularly outside Asia, will be critical and this will add to domestic criticism.

11. Paris Negotiations

Negotiations are not moving at this time and U.S. public is not optimistic about them. Setback will probably be temporary.

On the other hand, NVN may be a little more convinced it is in its interests to seek a negotiated settlement.

North Vietnamese will probably boycott for some period of time. Increases domestic pressure in U.S.

12. Thieu's Political Position

Success will strengthen Thieu's popularity and SVN confidence in him.

Souvanna may indicate operation is necessary, even though he was not consulted, in light of NVN activities.

Failure of the operation or a standoff with heavy casualties could completely demoralize SVN and undermine Thieu's chances politically.

Souvanna may have to denounce operation publicly, whether it is a success or failure, and this will make Thieu and U.S. seem irresponsible in eyes of the world. He will at least not be able to admit to consultations prior to operation.

13. Enemy Reactions

President has warned publicly that U.S. would bomb North if they moved across DMZ in violation of understanding. It is not likely they will incur this risk.

Operation will strengthen friendly capability to squeeze enemy in Cambodia and South Vietnam. Enemy has tended to concentrate forces in Laos. Therefore, ARVN success will have significant impact.

North Vietnamese might increase activities in South Vietnam, cross DMZ, move in Laos, or intensify activities in Cambodia.

117. Diary Entry by the White House Chief of Staff (Haldeman)¹

Washington, February 3, 1971.

Wednesday, February 3, 1971

The P originally had an NSC meeting scheduled for this morning but canceled it as a result of his long conversation last night with Henry after the “Evening at the White House”.² Apparently, Henry had become very concerned about the TV news reports regarding the Laos buildup, and especially about Dan Rather reporting that the P had met with the Action group late yesterday afternoon, and that they were trying to persuade him not to go ahead with plans for action. On the basis of that, Henry felt that they probably should cancel the plans and hold up on the Phase II operation.

The P put off a decision on it, though, until this morning and said that he wanted the NSC meeting canceled and, instead, he wanted to meet with Mitchell, Connally and me to review the bidding.³ We had that meeting at about 9:30.⁴ The P first spent some time with Henry and then called me in before the others arrived and reviewed the bidding on the situation to date, and what he considered the options to be. Henry’s argument was that the bureaucracy was so completely out of control that we wouldn’t be able to hold them into line if we went ahead, therefore, we should do so. By this morning, however, both Henry and the P had pretty much changed their minds and swung

¹ Source: *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House, the Complete Multimedia Edition*.

² According to the President’s Daily Diary, Nixon hosted an “Evening at the White House,” with opera singer Beverly Sills from 8:40 to 10:45 p.m. on February 2. Kissinger recalled that he met with Nixon the night of February 1 and suggested taking another look at the operation, whatever its undoubted military advantages, because the element of surprise was lost and the government was clearly divided. (*Ending the Vietnam War*, p. 198) According to the Daily Diary, Nixon met with Kissinger both nights, although the longer meeting, from 10:45 to 12:50, occurred on February 2. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President’s Daily Diary)

³ In *Ending the Vietnam War*, pp. 197–198, Kissinger wrote that he briefed Agnew, Connally, and Mitchell on the operation on February 1 and they endorsed it. Haig wrote in a January 29 draft memorandum to Kissinger that Kissinger should inform the attendees that Nixon decided in November to use the ARVN to “inflict maximum punishment on the enemy” during the upcoming dry season. Nixon had “encouraged the development of an imaginative scenario for offensive operations,” because U.S. intelligence indicated that Cambodia would be threatened and there would be too few U.S. troops for such an operation in the future. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 83, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. II) No other record of the meeting was found.

⁴ The meeting ran from 9:21 to 11:32 a.m. (*Ibid.*, White House Central Files, President’s Daily Diary) No other record was found.

back to feeling that we should go ahead with the operation, on the basis that if the P now allowed himself to be talked out of it, in effect by the press reports which had been leaked from State and Defense, that he would lose any hope of controlling the bureaucracy. My argument was that it had some validity, but even more important was the fact that we needed the move in order to ensure our continuing safe withdrawal, and also that I feel strongly that the proposed negatives that the others offer are certainly not assured, and in my view, not even probable. That is, I don't think the reaction in Congress or on the campuses, or in the press, or with the public is going to be nearly as strong or adverse as we are assuming it might be. Mitchell and Connally had pretty much the same views.

Our meeting lasted for two hours, and the P took a great deal of time to lay the case out very succinctly with all of its ramifications, and also had Henry fill in on some of the factors involved. Connally took a very strong position along basically the same lines that I had, arguing that it was well worth taking some risks now, and that we could ride it through, and we should do so to protect our position next year. The P had outlined that this will be our last chance for any major positive action since we won't be able to do anything after the dry season ends, and next year we won't have enough troops in place to be able to do anything. Mitchell bought this argument too, but didn't like the idea of the argument the P was making of the need to do this in order to maintain his leadership position in the bureaucracy. John felt the decision should not be made on those grounds, and both Connally and I agreed. There was no question within that room, however, that everyone by the end of the meeting felt strongly that we should go ahead with Phase II.

The P had me back in and discussed some more concern on how to get a hold of all this and also some concern on the PR side of it. He wanted me to work closely with Henry on that. Fortunately, because of the earlier developments, I guess, Henry asked me to attend the WSAG meeting and he also asked Ziegler to attend the first part of it.⁵ I tried to leave when Ziegler did, after we had discussed the basic PR plan for the Cambodian operation tonight, and for the removal of the embargo on the Laotian press coverage tomorrow. Ziegler left at that time and so did I, but Henry came up and called me back down to go over the whole scenario for the Laotian operation Sunday night.⁶ I did so and participated in all of the PR thinking. As a result of this, the P has concluded that this is probably the best way to handle this thing

⁵ See Document 118.

⁶ February 7.

from now on, that is, for me to sit in all critical meetings, and to force attention and consideration of Congressional and PR factors when they're making the decisions, and force them not to let that kind of decision be made by the generals and Under Secretaries. I think this will probably work pretty well, and it will, of course, be fascinating to do, as it was to sit in the WSAG meeting today and review the whole scenario for the operation.

After that meeting, the P called me over to the EOB, where he had been working in the afternoon, and I reviewed the bidding with him briefly. K walked in, in the middle of it, and we discussed it further. The P confirmed that he does want to go ahead and wants Henry to give the execute order.

We had a rather interesting episode as the P's appointment with Dr. Riland came due, and he proceeded to take off his clothes and go into the outer room and have us sit down and continue the discussion with him while Riland wrenched his back and went through his manipulations. Following the Riland treatment and after he had left, the P sat in one of the chairs in his outer office with just his shorts on and pursued the conversation a little further.⁷ Then Henry and I left with the understanding that the plan was set and we would go ahead.

⁷ This meeting ran from 5:29 to 6:55 p.m. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary)

118. Minutes of a Meeting of the Senior Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, February 3, 1971, 2:15 p.m.

SUBJECT

Southeast Asia Dry Season Campaign

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	NSC Staff
State	Brig. Gen. A. M. Haig
U. Alexis Johnson	Colonel Richard T. Kennedy
Defense	WH Staff
David Packard	H. R. Haldeman
Daniel Z. Henkin	Ronald L. Ziegler
CIA	
Richard Helms	
JCS	
Admiral Thomas Moorer	

Mr. Kissinger: How can we lift the embargo at least partially and how can we relate the Phase I operation to Chup?

Mr. Johnson: (Reads message from Berger—Tab B in meeting book.²) State went back Flash to Berger asking then to go with scenario we earlier recommended.³ The information is already moving from Saigon, thus it doesn't matter. We should go ahead with briefings to Congress this afternoon.

Mr. Kissinger: The President wants to keep the specifics of our participation down. He wants no numbers—only general statement. Low level people should do the briefing. We must avoid a crisis atmosphere.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. According to a chronology attached to a memorandum from Howe to Haig, February 9, the meeting ended at 4:15 p.m. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 84, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. IV) All brackets are in the original with the exception of those indicating omitted material.

² Tab B is telegram 1597 from Saigon, February 3, in which Berger reported on his meeting with Thieu in response to instructions in telegram 18204 to Saigon and Phnom Penh, February 2, asking Berger and Swank to inform their host governments that the Chup operation was scheduled to begin at 3 p.m., February 3, Washington time. The Department wrote that it was important that GKR and GVN spokesmen make clear that they had agreed at political levels to do the operation, but Berger reported that Thieu did not feel this was necessary. (Both *ibid.*, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, DEF 6 VIET S)

³ Not further identified.

It should be portrayed as an SVN operation in the old sanctuary areas. We are only doing what they can't do. It must be kept in low key.

Mr. Johnson: I think it should be done by only Defense and State Congressional liaison people with no White House or military briefers. [All agree.]

Mr. Kissinger: They can start any time after this meeting.

Mr. Helms: Stennis called this morning for general briefing on Southeast Asia.

Mr. Kissinger: I would call it off if you can. Stennis is not aware of these operations.

Mr. Helms: It would have nothing to do with these operations.

Mr. Kissinger: O.K.

Mr. Helms: The briefing gives general background including enemy supply information.

Mr. Kissinger: What do briefers say when asked if there is anything else?

Mr. Johnson: What can they say?

Mr. Henkin: Rely on the Military Region I briefings. All on these lists were briefed on Military Region I.

Mr. Kissinger: The Secretary of State called Fulbright and Aiken.

Mr. Packard: Then they say this is all we have to give you—you already have been briefed on MR-1.

Mr. Kissinger: There should be No Comment on the projected length of the Chup operation. It will fall from the papers quickly. Can we get SVN to limit American newsmen?

Admiral Moorer: It would be better to let the water seek its own level.

Mr. Kissinger: Is there anything more on Chup?

Admiral Moorer: There is a message from Swank—he is concerned that he and Lon Nol are not informed.⁴

Mr. Johnson: The question of whether they were informed or not is not so important. The real question is does FANK know?

Admiral Moorer: The Cambodians know. We asked the question of Abrams—but they don't get into the operation until Phase II of Chup. This may be a disconnect.

Mr. Kissinger: Who briefed the Cambodians?

⁴ In telegram 465 from Phnom Penh, February 3, Swank reported that the decision to begin the Chup operation "comes to us and to FANK as complete surprise," and that "as far as FANK is concerned is still in planning stage and that movements of 2400 Khmer who were to participate in the operation are not contemplated for at least a week." (Ibid., POL 27 CAMB)

Admiral Moorer: Tri briefed them.

Mr. Kissinger: Can't we get Berger and Abrams to Thieu and Swank to Lon Nol? Maybe Lon Nol doesn't want to make a statement.

Mr. Packard: He probably doesn't want to look as though he has to call on the SVN for help.

Mr. Kissinger: Can't we send MACV officers to brief Swank and possibly the FANK?

Admiral Moorer: I will work this out with Alex Johnson.

[Omitted here is discussion of the public relations aspects of the operations in which the group agreed to lift the embargo on the media's release of information on Phase I of the Laos operation once the announcement on Chup was made in Saigon at 3:30 a.m., February 4, Washington time.]

[5 minute recess at 1500 hrs. Henkin & Ziegler leave. Meeting reconvenes at 1510.]

Mr. Kissinger: PRG says in Paris that they will fight on even if we enter Laos. They are always willing to show good will, however. Not let's turn to the scenario for Tchepone.

Mr. Kissinger: We will notify Thieu immediately of the execute order when the decision is made. Why should we tell Souvanna ahead?

Mr. Johnson: Godley wants a "no comment" answer on the question of Souvanna consultations. The problem is to keep him protected. We have the 1962 accords and are assisting the SVN invasion without having let Souvanna know. We have to frame the U Thant letter carefully and should let Souvanna know so he can be as consistent as possible.⁵ Maybe, therefore, we do have to get to him early.

Mr. Kissinger: Would we inform him by official communication or through Godley privately?

Mr. Johnson: There is no advantage to the informal approach. We can separate the contingency letter approach without telling him.

Mr. Kissinger: How will we deal with Souvanna publicly? We can't say "no comment" because that means yes. What do we say?

Mr. Helms: There is no way except to stand up to a white lie. Couldn't we find some language which is not entirely untrue.

Mr. Kissinger: I think we all agree that we cannot reply he was consulted.

⁵ According to a February 3 memorandum to Kissinger from Kennedy, briefing him for the meeting, the Department of State was supposed to have prepared a letter to U Thant for the discussion. No drafts were found. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-79, WSAG Meeting, Principals Only Vietnam 2-3-71)

Mr. Packard: We have to say that we told him and regret that this action was necessary.

Mr. Johnson: This is a really serious problem.

Mr. Kissinger: The President has agreed to consult with Stennis.⁶

[Omitted here is discussion of the schedule for diplomatic, Congressional, and public notifications on the Tchepone operation. The group agreed that congressional consultations would begin on Sunday, February 7, except for the one with Senator Stennis. Kissinger noted that Nixon wanted “no high key reaction” in Washington, so the group agreed that no one would appear on television. They also agreed to allow Rogers and Laird to jointly appear before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on February 10 and for Laird to appear before the Senate Armed Services Committee if requested. Finally, Johnson volunteered to prepare a contingency study on what to do if Souvanna were overthrown.]

⁶ According to the President’s Daily Diary, Nixon met with Moore, Kissinger, and Stennis in the Oval Office, 1:36–2 p.m., February 3. (Ibid., White House Central Files) No other record of the meeting was found. Kissinger recalled that Nixon met with Stennis after he and Moorer had briefed the President on the operation and that once Stennis agreed, Nixon gave the execute order. Kissinger informed the principals at 6 p.m. (*Ending the Vietnam War*, p. 198)

119. Memorandum for the 40 Committee¹

Washington, February 3, 1971.

SUBJECT

Covert Actions in Support of U.S. Objective in South Vietnam's 1971 Elections

1. CIA's Vietnam Station has proposed a program of covert action to be taken in support of the policy recommendations made by Ambassador Bunker.²

2. The covert action program is designed to achieve the following objectives:

a) Re-elect Nguyen Van Thieu as President in October 1971.

b) Influence political party development in South Vietnam so that a small number of parties will come to possess the long-range stability they need to play a vital role in the political struggle on the ground against North Vietnamese political agents. The goal of these efforts will be two to four viable political parties which can bind the democratic structure of the government to South Vietnam's approximately 6.2 million voters.

c) Elect individuals to the Lower House in 1971 who will support President Thieu's election in October and his subsequent legislative programs.

d) Ensure an orderly transition of power should Thieu not be re-elected.

e) Contribute to maintaining a government in South Vietnam that supports long-term United States policy objectives in Southeast Asia.

¹ Source: Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, 40 Committee Meetings. Secret; Eyes Only. Coerr forwarded the memorandum to Johnson on February 4, and recommended that he ask at the 40 Committee meeting that day about the risks of press or Congressional detection of the covert assistance, the chances for South Vietnamese legislators if they were not given covert support, and the implications if the legislators whom the United States supported lost their elections. He also recommended that Johnson propose making approval contingent on developments in the next few weeks. On the back of the memorandum is the following undated note: "Karamessines now says: 1. CIA favors and will support in 40. 2. It is a relatively modest plan. 3. CIA believes it can maintain security." In a February 3 memorandum to Kissinger, Chapin recommended that he ask for Helms' and Johnson's assessment of the prospects for the election and Minh's chances, Helms' and Packard's view on how a GVN leadership change would affect current U.S. programs, Helms' ideas on avoiding detection, everyone's assessment of telegram 307 (Document 100), and the relative effectiveness of overt and covert actions. (National Security Council, Nixon Intelligence Files, Subject Files, Vietnam, 14 Jan 1971–22 Dec 1971)

² See Document 100.

f) Elect twenty individuals to the Lower House in 1971 who will be responsive to CIA direction. This group of legislators would be predominantly pro-Thieu and could work directly with him. For contingency purposes, however, some of them would be in the opposition camp. These individuals, after their election, would be used to collect political intelligence from key GVN ministries or political parties. In addition, they would simultaneously function as agents of influence in both the Thieu and the opposition camps in order to have a positive impact on Lower House legislation and South Vietnamese political events which are of policy concern to the United States.

3. Our operational program has four main elements: (a) covert support to the organizational activity or Lower House candidates of the nascent Farmer-Worker Party, a Montagnard party, a unified Catholic grouping, and the Progressive Nationalist Movement; (b) covert support of approximately 20 candidates for election to the Lower House who will be responsive to CIA covert direction; (c) establishment of a contingency fund of [*dollar amount not declassified*] for President Thieu; and (d) contingency actions comprising direct election support to two An Quang Buddhist candidates and measures to improve access to Duong Van ("Big") Minh's entourage.

4. Our efforts would include the following:

a) We would continue to provide assistance to the organizational efforts of the Farmer-Worker Party (FWP). On 7 August 1970 the 40 Committee approved the expenditure of [*dollar amount not declassified*] for support to FWP organizational activity.³ These funds were not expended as rapidly as originally anticipated due to a slower pace of organizing provincial conventions, and approximately half remains unspent at this time. A national convention was finally held on 17 January 1971. The FWP currently encompasses among its key supporters seven Senators and three Lower House members who represent Catholics, Buddhists, Khmers, Chams, and some Hoa Hao and Cao Dai. The funds which remain would be used to support FWP candidates for the Lower House in specific constituencies. The FWP would be guided through its Executive Council to support President Thieu's re-election and would expect to have Thieu's support for a fixed number of FWP Lower House candidates.

b) We would provide support to Montagnard leaders who would work through the Movement of Unity of the Highland Ethnic Minorities to elect candidates to the Lower House from the provinces of Quang Ngai, Kontum, Pleiku, Phu Bon, Darlac, Quang Duc, Tuyen Duc and Phuoc Long. These leaders wish to reach an understanding with Pres-

³ See Document 14.

ident Thieu for mutual election support. One of the Montagnard leaders has already discussed this proposal with President Thieu and has received some funds with which to initiate the project. However, additional covert support and guidance will be needed to assist this development through other clandestine assets. We would support the election of from 10 to 12 Montagnard candidates through the expenditure of [*dollar amount not declassified*].

c) We would covertly exercise leverage within Catholic parties, particularly the Revolutionary Social Humanist (Nhan Xa) Party and the Greater Solidarity Force, in order to encourage political coalescence and voter unity. The envisaged resultant party would also include some Hoa Hao elements. This effort is most important if dissipation of the Catholic vote, which occurred during the 1970 Senate elections, is to be avoided. The unified party would put forth Lower House candidates who would work with and support President Thieu in his own re-election bid. It is proposed that funds be utilized to promote efforts toward political coalescence of the existing parties; but failing such consolidation, direct action would be taken to support, through clandestine assets, the Lower House candidacies of one or two Catholics in constituencies considered pivotal in President Thieu's re-election campaign. We would spend [*dollar amount not declassified*] for this activity.

d) We would provide support to two or three Lower House candidates of the Progressive Nationalist Movement (PNM) through covert channels to the leadership of this party. The primary intent of this effort would be to nudge the PNM firmly into the Thieu camp. Through this action, or through direct infusion of funds into the PNM if direct candidate support should not prove feasible, we would attempt to retain an equity in this group in the event it should become a full-fledged opposition element. If President Thieu should fail to be re-elected, it is quite possible that the PNM will have a position in the next government, at which time our access to it could be significant in terms of bringing about an orderly transition of power. We would spend up to [*dollar amount not declassified*] for this activity.

5. Most of the 20 candidates for election to the Lower House whom we would assist would be supporters of President Thieu and, once elected, could influence their local constituencies to get out the vote in favor of Thieu in the Presidential elections a month later. However, several candidates would be in the opposition camp, and we would assist their campaigns in order to have intelligence coverage of, and influence over, the opposition in the event President Thieu fails to win re-election. Following the election all of our assets in the Lower House would be utilized both for intelligence collection purposes and as agents of influence to promote or block passage of legislation accord-

ing to the needs of U.S. policy. An effort would be made to assure a regional balance among these 20 candidates. The average individual financial support given to these candidates would be [*dollar amount not declassified*] and maximum total support would be [*dollar amount not declassified*].

6. The [*dollar amount not declassified*] contingency fund for President Thieu would come from funds previously approved by the 40 Committee, but not spent, for support of the now-moribund National Social Democratic Front (NSDF). On 7 August 1970 the 40 Committee was informed that half of the previously approved [*dollar amount not declassified*] had been passed to President Thieu for the NSDF, and no additional funds have since been passed. These contingency funds would be for direct election support should Thieu specifically request this from Ambassador Bunker, or for funding activities which the Vietnam Station identifies to Thieu as problem areas, or for activities which are in Thieu's election interest and to which he agrees but for which he would be unable to find the necessary funds. While it is recognized that the major costs of President Thieu's campaign will be borne by Thieu and his financial backers, the availability of this contingency fund would provide the Vietnam Station with flexibility in case of need.

7. We would take the following actions both to assist our collection of intelligence information on opposition activities prior to the elections and to prepare for the contingency that President Thieu may not win re-election:

a) We would improve our contingent capability by working through clandestine assets within the An Quang Buddhists to elect two Lower House candidates [*less than 1 line not declassified*] capable of being influenced by us. This effort would endeavor to focus An Quang political action on preparation for its 1975 political goals while at the same time strengthening the moderate wing of An Quang over the militants by assisting it to achieve several carefully selected 1971 election victories. This effort would not only assure us an intelligence window into An Quang political activity during the 1971 election campaigns, but in the event President Thieu should fail to win re-election, it would provide essential access to this group which would then probably be on the side of the winner. The cost of this activity would not exceed [*dollar amount not declassified*].

b) Our Vietnam Station would spend up to [*dollar amount not declassified*] in order to recruit or infiltrate one or two persons into "Big" Minh's entourage. This would be done for the purposes of obtaining intelligence information on Minh's campaign activities, possibly as a basis for designing counter-activities in support of President Thieu's campaign, and of having agents of influence close to Minh in case he should win the election.

8. The activities described in paragraphs 4 through 7 above would cost a total of [*dollar amount not declassified*]. Of this amount, the 40 Committee previously approved expenditure of [*dollar amount not declassified*] for Farmer-Worker Party organizational activity. The Vietnam Station has proposed, in addition, that [*dollar amount not declassified*] of the funds authorized for the NSDF be used for President Thieu's contingency fund. Thus, if the 40 Committee were to approve our Vietnam Station's proposals in full, additional funding approval in the amount of [*dollar amount not declassified*] would be required [*dollar amount not declassified*]. Funds in this amount are available within the CIA budget.

9. Although it is a part of President Thieu's own campaign strategy to influence the Lower House elections in order to promote support for his own re-election, we would not want to reveal to him our support for specific Lower House candidates. First, our support for these candidates will be very limited, and if Thieu were knowledgeable of our support he might well deny these candidates his own financial support which many of them may require. Secondly, our support in several cases would go to opposition candidates for the purposes indicated previously, and Thieu obviously should not have knowledge of this activity. Thirdly, our long-range intention is to place agents in the Lower House who can influence legislation in support of U.S. objectives on a non-attributable basis, an influence which could be jeopardized if Thieu were aware of the U.S. connections of these assets.

10. The Vietnam Station would pass funds to Lower House candidates, or to the political parties, in increments sufficiently small to be covered by their overt sources of income. In all cases, the existence of adequate overt income sources would be assured before commitments were made. The Station would also assure itself that it would be in the self-interest of all recipients of funds not to reveal their source. In the event that any claims of CIA or U.S. support should be made public, we would expect to have the U.S. Embassy deny them. We would further expect that President Thieu would be given such strong personal assurance of U.S. support for his re-election that he would tend to discount any claim of U.S. support which might emanate from any oppositionist Lower House candidate.⁴

11. On 30 January 1971 Ambassador Bunker gave his approval to these proposals.

⁴ According to an unsigned memorandum for the record, October 22, the 40 Committee met on February 4 and approved the proposal, but since the Executive Secretary was not present no minutes of the meeting were taken. (Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, 40 Committee Meetings)

120. Minutes of a Meeting of the Senior Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, February 4, 1971, 3 p.m.

SUBJECT

Southeast Asia Dry Season Campaign

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	NSC Staff
State	Brig. Gen. A. M. Haig
U. Alexis Johnson	Col. Richard T. Kennedy
Ambassador Bunker	WH Staff
CIA	H. R. Haldeman
Richard Helms	Attorney General John Mitchell
JCS	
Admiral Thomas Moorer	

Mr. Helms: There are no major NVA forces moving into the area. They are concentrating on increasing readiness and setting up defenses.

Admiral Moorer: There are about 14,000 enemy combat forces in the area but no new combat forces have moved in.

Mr. Kissinger: We need a plan for diversionary landings today.²

Admiral Moorer: I will have this done (Admiral Moorer then briefed on the positioning of US and ARVN forces, all of which is moving according to plan and on schedule).

Mr. Kissinger: When will major movements of ARVN forces occur?

Admiral Moorer: The majority will occur on Saturday and Sunday.³

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. According to a chronology attached to a memorandum from Howe to Haig, February 9, the meeting ended at 4:21 p.m. (*Ibid.*, NSC Files, Box 84, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. IV) All brackets are in the original.

² In memorandum CM-565-71 to Laird, February 4, Moorer detailed a plan to deploy an Amphibious Ready Group and Marine Amphibious Unit to operate off the southern coast of North Vietnam for the purpose of holding NVN troops in-country because of concern on the enemy's part as to U.S. intentions. The forces were to come from U.S. Naval Task Force 77. The following was written on an attached note from the Office of the Deputy Secretary of Defense to Packard: "The President decided not to do this at this time. Reason—it might excite the Russians more than is desirable. It may be done later." (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330-76-207, Box 10, Indochina 381, Jan-Dec 1971)

³ February 6 and 7.

Mr. Kissinger: When will the NVA know that they are coming down Route 9?

Admiral Moorer: On Sunday night.

Mr. Haldeman: There presumably will be much movement in the east at some point—when will it be seen and reported? Will there be a particular movement when it becomes more obvious?

Admiral Moorer: No there won't be a specific point at which it becomes more obvious. It is a continuous movement which has been going on.

Mr. Johnson: What about the period about 12 hours ahead of H-hour?

Admiral Moorer: The ARVN armor will move up to the border but so much will be moving, the enemy won't be able to tell what is taking place. It will be clear by Monday morning the ARVN is attacking into Laos—the enemy will know then. The ARVN airborne won't go in until Wednesday.

Admiral Moorer: The Chup operation is going quietly and well and is on schedule. They will get into a fight there sooner or later. In summary—in North preparations are going well. We have had no casualties so far and the enemy is not moving forces—just alerting them. The enemy forces at Tchepone got the same instructions to tighten defenses last spring as they have now.

Mr. Johnson: We need to decide on terminology. Can we refer to these areas as NVN Base Area 604 and 611 in Laos?

Ambassador Bunker: We should not talk about Tchepone.

Mr. Johnson: I think there is some advantage to saying that they are going after both base areas. [All agree.]

Mr. Kissinger: D-day remains February 8. We do not want any identification of a terminal date for the operation in any briefings or instructions. The President feels strongly about this. *This should be covered in instructions.*

Mr. Haldeman: What will the ARVN briefer Lam say?

Admiral Moorer: He will say that as long as the operation is lucrative he will want to stay.

Mr. Haldeman: The problem will be with the Senators on the Hill.

Mr. Johnson: Why should we say anything about when the ARVN will withdraw other than at the end of the operation?

Mr. Kissinger: There would be no problem with saying on background that how long the ARVN remains depends on whether the NVA stays.

Mr. Packard: We have to avoid having the clock run on us.

Mr. Kissinger: We must notify Bruce.

Mr. Johnson: I will do this.

Mr. Kissinger: [To Helms] Would you please keep an eye on what Hanoi, the Russians and Chicoms say and do?

Mr. Helms: Yes, I will do a daily report.

Mr. Kissinger: We need a contingency plan in the event the NVA attack west into Laos.

Mr. Johnson: We are doing a contingency plan if Souvanna falls and will have that by the end of the day. We also will do one on an NVA attack west into Laos.

Mr. Helms: Reinforcing in the north part of SVN is tough. The weather is bad and thus it will be hard to increase the amount of air activity.

Admiral Moorer: We will try to pick up the air activity—but the weather has been bad.

Ambassador Bunker: Thieu asked if we could increase our air support.

Mr. Packard: We have the assets and Abrams has authority to use them if weather permits.

Mr. Kissinger: We need to include in our contingency plans the use of B-52s if needed.

Mr. Kissinger: Let's go to how we proceed with Souvanna. We should inform Thieu and Souvanna now. As to questions about consultations with Souvanna, no comment won't do as an answer. We should say that this is a GVN operation and we don't know what they did. [All agree.]

Mr. Haldeman: How do we deal with the Saigon report that any announcement would come from USG?

Mr. Johnson: I will draft an instruction to Berger to say that there should be no reference to the USG. I will also get a draft of a proposed GVN letter to the Security Council out to Berger for comment.

Mr. Kissinger: [to Bunker] When should you return?

Ambassador Bunker: Well, after they get started.

Mr. Kissinger: It is up to you.

Mr. Johnson: Can we let Souvanna know tomorrow evening when we can get to him, the language of letters to the Security Council?

Mr. Kissinger: We might tell Godley now.

Mr. Johnson: I will repeat the cable to Godley and be sure he can reach Souvanna over the weekend.

Mr. Kissinger: We should get word to Thieu now that the President approves the operation.

Mr. Johnson: I will do this.⁴

Mr. Kissinger: The President will inform Senator Mansfield and the Speaker tomorrow morning. Only thing remaining is when to see Stennis.

Mr. Johnson: We'll have problems on security with Mansfield.

Mr. Haldeman: The President has not. When will we tell Fulbright? [Attorney General arrives 1545.]

Mr. Johnson: Senator Fulbright is last on the scenario.

Mr. Kissinger: If it gets blown we'll know we were wrong. I will call to President's attention the possibility of leaks.

Mr. Johnson: Do we want to go through the Congressional list? We put Scott and Ford first.

Mr. Kissinger: I'll see Ford tonight.

Mr. Packard: We have a different view. We believe Capen and Abshire should tell them on Saturday that we will have a briefing Sunday or Monday for them.

Mr. Johnson: I'll agree with low key phone approach on Saturday.

Mr. Haldeman: We should be sure they understand that we are willing to give them word in advance.

Mr. Kissinger: If we call on Saturday, someone will leak that something is coming up.

Mr. Helms: Why not tell them on Sunday morning that the ARVN is going into Laos Sunday night and that we are willing to brief them Sunday afternoon or Monday. [All agree to calls Sunday morning.]

Mr. Kissinger: We need a new list for Saturday afternoon and Sunday calls. State and Defense should provide this first thing in the morning.

Mr. Johnson: On diplomatic side of the scenario, we should redo Item 7.⁵

⁴ In telegram 19640 to Saigon, February 4, sent 6:24 p.m., the Department indicated that Nixon had approved Phase II and instructed Berger and Abrams to inform Thieu, emphasizing that he should be clear that this was a Vietnamese operation and decision, and that he should closely maintain its security until it was launched. The Department added that it wanted to avoid continued press speculation from Saigon that the GVN was awaiting Nixon's decision. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 84, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. IV)

⁵ Reference is to the diplomatic, Congressional, and public relations scenario for Phase II. Under Diplomatic Actions, Item 7, which was scheduled to begin at "H-2," i.e., 2 hours before Phase II began, reads as follows: "Inform representatives of other selected friendly nations in Washington as follows: Germany, Norway, Italy, Netherlands, Mexico, China, India, Belgium, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia." The scenario is attached as Tab A to a memorandum from Kennedy to Kissinger, February 4. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-79, WSAG Meeting Southeast Asia 2-4-71)

Mr. Kissinger: The countries listed in Item 7 should not get the prepositioned cable instruction delivered until H-2 or a reasonable later hour. Why should we tell Japanese?

Mr. Johnson: We will do it here in low key.

Mr. Kissinger: The Canadian who you will advise here has all Sunday afternoon to hold this.⁶

Mr. Johnson: That will be no problem. We believe the GVN letter to the Security Council should go first.⁷ I will get this out tonight to principals.

Mr. Kissinger: Why do we have to send a letter to the Security Council?

Mr. Johnson: We are involved.

Mr. Kissinger: But we are bombing all the time—this is not “low posture.”

Mr. Johnson: We are already charged with being the ones to make the decision.

Mr. Kissinger: Why shouldn't we wait until the question is raised in the Security Council and then support the GVN.

Mr. Johnson: I thought we would release the letters on Sunday night.

Mr. Kissinger: But we've been bombing all the time.

Mr. Haldeman: What will Southerland have said? There is some advantage in having a paper on table.

Mr. Kissinger: On the other hand it forces all others to take a position.

Mr. Helms: What do we add by putting letter in? I don't think it's a good idea.

Mr. Kissinger: It will make it tougher for us. If Russians have to respond to the document it will be difficult for everyone. We want to avoid a diplomatic step which suggests that we are invading Laos. If they scream we can still send a letter to the Security Council later.

Mr. Johnson: [to Bunker] Will GVN buy this?

Ambassador Bunker: Yes.

Mr. Johnson: I still feel we need a paper which gives US positions.

Mr. Packard: But this is a GVN operation.

⁶ According to Item 5 of the scenario, the Japanese and Canadian Ambassadors in Washington would be informed at H-4 hours.

⁷ Under Item 9 of the scenario, the GVN observer in New York was to deliver a letter to the President of the Security Council explaining the action at “H+2.”

Mr. Johnson: It won't work—would the appearance of the Secretary of State at the Foreign Relations Committee do it?⁸

Mr. Kissinger: We have had a deliberate policy not to high key this—we'll have to look at this again.

⁸ In his February 4 diary entry, Haldeman noted that during the discussion of whether Rogers should brief the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he argued in favor "because it would give us our story on television Monday night, after the Sunday night move." He added: "Henry didn't want it done that way and was furious at my stepping in, slammed his book shut, sat and stewed at the head of the table for a few minutes and then abruptly adjourned the meeting for a five minute recess." (*The Haldeman Diaries: Complete Multimedia Edition*)

121. Minutes of a Meeting of the Senior Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, February 5, 1971, 2:50 p.m.

SUBJECT

Southeast Asia Dry Season Campaign

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	JCS
State	Admiral Thomas Moorer
U. Alexis Johnson	NSC Staff
Ambassador Bunker	Brig. Gen. A. M. Haig
Robert J. McCloskey	Col. Richard T. Kennedy
Defense	WH Staff
David Packard	H. R. Haldeman
Daniel Z. Henkin	Ronald Ziegler
CIA	
Richard Helms	

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. According to a chronology attached to a memorandum from Howe to Haig, February 9, the meeting ended at 4:45 p.m. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 84, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. IV) All brackets except those that indicate omission of unrelated material are in the original.

Mr. Johnson: I have a draft telegram of instructions which we should go over carefully.²

Mr. Kissinger: Let's cover the situation first.

Admiral Moorer: All is proceeding on schedule and nothing has changed in the situation or plans. The Khe Sanh air strips are being worked on. We have moved the amphibious force north to serve as deception. Enemy activity is at a low level and we are continuing to position forces.

Mr. Kissinger: How long can we keep the diversion force operating?

Admiral Moorer: Two weeks easily. It really depends on when the enemy realizes that it is just a feint.

Mr. Helms: There are no significant changes on the enemy side.³ We have sent out to all of you a compilation of all intercepts.

Mr. Kissinger: Let us turn to the public relations side. We will put Ziegler in charge of the governmental press side on this and all will work together as a team.

Mr. Packard: There should be no backgrounders or statements by anyone but the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense.

Mr. Kissinger: I agree.

Mr. Packard: All heat should be diverted to Defense.

Mr. Ziegler: I agree. We should push the questions to the Departments and they should push to the field. The field should refer to the Vietnamese.

Mr. Kissinger: I agree with that approach.

Mr. Packard: I think the briefings in Saigon should be by South Vietnamese without US participation. There should be no US there.

Mr. Kissinger: I'm not sure that is wise. We are going to be asked what we are doing.

Mr. Packard: I think there should be a briefing by SVN a couple of hours after the operation begins. Then later we can follow up with whatever we want.

Mr. Kissinger: Couldn't we have an American officer there to say what we are doing?

² Draft telegram to Bangkok, Canberra, London, Phnom Penh, Seoul, and Wellington, prepared by Sullivan on February 5. Holdridge forwarded a copy of the telegram with handwritten edits to Kissinger under a February 6 covering memorandum. (Ibid., Box H-79, WSAG (Principals Only) Vietnam 2-6-71)

³ Helms sent Intelligence Memorandum SC02374/71, February 5, to Kissinger, under a February 5 covering memorandum, in which he noted that the enemy's intelligence prior to Lam Son 719 was poor. (Ibid., Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam Operations in Laos and Cambodia, Vol. II) Lam Son 719 was the new name for Phase II of the Tchepone operation.

Mr. Packard: Well, the newsmen will hang on what the US officer says.

Mr. Ziegler: If there is no American there, we will get calls here for response.

[Bunker joins—1455]

Mr. McCloskey: The first point to make is that there are no US ground forces involved. This would come best from an American.

Mr. Haldeman: That is OK, so long as the US officer doesn't get out in front.

Mr. Johnson: The first briefing will be by General Lam in I Corps.

Mr. Henkin: Is that open for discussion?

Admiral Moorer: I think it would best be done in Saigon. It should be scheduled in Saigon and then Lam could take it from there.

Mr. Helms: Would Thieu go first?

Mr. Kissinger: That would be OK. Then he would be followed by a military briefing with SVN military and a US officer.

Mr. Ziegler: How would Thieu go?

Mr. Johnson: He has a statement to make.⁴

Ambassador Bunker: It is a good statement.

Mr. Johnson: Better than ours?

Mr. Kissinger: Assuming that the Thieu statement would be made at 0800, we could have a news briefing in Saigon at 0830. Can they do this?

Ambassador Bunker: Yes.

Mr. Haldeman: What does this do to our wish to have the SVN first?

Mr. Ziegler: Well it's OK if Thieu goes first.

Mr. Johnson: We would drop the Lam briefing for the time being.

Mr. Ziegler: Will newsmen move stories from I Corps without briefing?

Mr. Packard: Yes.

Mr. Johnson: We have to make sure they have copies of Thieu's statement.

Mr. Ziegler: Can we have briefing texts in I Corps the same as in Saigon?

Admiral Moorer: It is difficult in I Corps because the newsmen are scattered.

Mr. Kissinger: Can we get the text of what the American officer would say?

⁴ In telegram 1750 from Saigon, February 5, the Embassy transmitted the text of the GVN statement announcing the commencement of Phase II of Lam Son 719. (Ibid., NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-79, WSAG Meeting Southeast Asia 2-5-71)

Mr. Packard: Yes, I have one—a point paper.⁵

Mr. Haldeman: How does he describe the kind and amount of air support?

Mr. Henkin: He would make only a statement at first.

Mr. Kissinger: Will that result in speculation?

Mr. Ziegler: Everybody knows from Rogers' statement that we will give full air support.⁶ He should say that "this may include" and then give the types.

Mr. Holdridge: I agree. They'll ask if we are going to use helicopters. Then we go back to the statement. We will provide whatever is required.

[Omitted here is discussion of language and timing of the MACV press briefing, of allowing correspondents into Laos, and of language for a cable notifying Souvanna Phouma of the operation.]

Mr. Kissinger: Is this the best time to move the amphibious force or should we wait a while.

Admiral Moorer: It will get there about Sunday⁷ night.

Mr. Kissinger: Is there any indication that NVA is moving toward Tchepone?

Admiral Moorer: No.

Mr. Kissinger: Then if we frightened them after the operation began, maybe this would be best.

Admiral Moorer: The more they have to think about when the operation moves, the better.

Mr. Kissinger: My concern is their reaction after a week when we have succeeded.

Mr. Packard: We'll give you some other operations and options which we can consider.

Mr. Kissinger: My only question is "Is it better to have the amphibious operation a week later to hold them from reinforcing at Tchepone"?

Admiral Moorer: I will look at this again.

Mr. Johnson: I have another long cable.⁸ It is the basic instruction and guidance. Secretary Laird will go up to the Hill on Monday for

⁵ Not found.

⁶ During a press conference on January 29, Rogers stated that the United States would not rule out the use of U.S. air power to support Asians in any effort they make to fight North Vietnam. See the Department of State *Bulletin*, February 15, 1971, pp. 189–197.

⁷ February 7.

⁸ Apparently the draft; see footnote 2 above.

closed session for briefings. This was agreed between Laird, Rogers and the President.⁹

Mr. Kissinger: But then the evening television news will be all Rogers and Laird. It would look like an American operation. Wouldn't it be better to hold up until Tuesday. I think we should check this again with the President.

Mr. Packard: Mel wants to go up. He wants to make clear that no American ground troops are involved. We are continuing Vietnamization and withdrawals.

[Haldeman returns 1605 hours]

Mr. Kissinger: [to Haldeman] What do you think?

Mr. Packard: The idea would be to reassure the committees.

Mr. Johnson: When Rogers calls Fulbright on Sunday, it would have a tactical advantage to volunteer to come up on Monday.

Mr. Kissinger: There still is some advantage to waiting until Tuesday.

Mr. Haldeman: Monday is critical for the public. We want to keep the US posture low. The President is concerned that we set it in the right context at the outset. He wants to rely on Monday on the Congressional people who will already have been briefed.

Mr. Johnson: Then no administration people will be saying anything on Monday?

Mr. Holdridge: Whatever others say will be without the base of having talked with the Secretary. [All agreed to talk this over again with the principals.]

Mr. Johnson: We need to get out a cable to our posts. I will send out an alerting cable to Ambassadors.

Mr. Packard: We want to be less specific about the particular areas of operation.

Admiral Moorer: How about limited duration? [All agreed on limited duration.]

Mr. Kissinger: We want to add the point that this is particularly important in light of the closing of Sihanoukville.

Mr. Johnson: In paragraph 2, 4th line of the cable we should delete reference to artillery firing and also delete it in the next line.

Mr. Kissinger: I agree. We also should say logistic and combat air so that all use the same public line. We need to be sure to get a standard statement. We will meet tomorrow at 10:30 to discuss cable again.

⁹ See Document 118.

Mr. Johnson: On the Congressional side. All contacts are to be done on Sunday [all agreed]. Abshire and Capen will do this from the list we have approved.

Mr. Kissinger: Should Ford be singled out and briefed as the Minority Leader?

Mr. Haldeman: Yes, he should.

Mr. Kissinger: [to Haldeman] Should you call Scott?

Mr. Haldeman: He should be singled out separately also. Mr. Kissinger should do this.

Mr. Kissinger: The congressional briefing will follow the line of the cable.

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

[All agree] [The meeting is adjourned]

122. Summary of Decisions of a Meeting of the Senior Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, February 6, 1971, 10:50 a.m.

SUBJECT

Southeast Asia Dry Season Campaign

PARTICIPANTS

Henry Kissinger, Chairman

State—U. Alexis Johnson; William H. Sullivan; Ambassador Bunker

Defense—David Packard; Dennis Doolin

CIA—Richard Helms; Mr. Donahue

JCS—Admiral Thomas Moorer

NSC—Col. Richard Kennedy; John Holdridge; W. R. Smyser

WH Staff—H.R. Haldeman; Ronald Ziegler

SUMMARY OF DECISIONS

1. The press statements on Operation Lamson should include the separate release of the MACV statement and the Ziegler statement² to

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-79, WSAG (Principals Only) Vietnam 2–6–71. No classification marking. According to the separate minutes of the meeting, it ended at 2:15 p.m. (Ibid.)

² Ziegler included in a memorandum to Kissinger, February 5, the drafts of a statement to be released by MACV after Thieu released his statement and a statement to be

which a reference to artillery firing from SVN should be added. The statement should read that U.S. artillery support from positions in South Vietnam will be available to the ARVN.

2. The President wanted Pompidou informed in advance consistent with security.

released by Henkin confirming the MACV and Thieu statements. (Ibid., Box H-79, WSAG (Principals Only) Vietnam 2-6-71) On February 9, Zeigler gave a news briefing on Laos. See *Public Papers: Nixon, 1971*, p. 1221.

123. Minutes of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, February 7, 1971, 11 a.m.

SUBJECT

Southeast Asia Dry Season Campaign

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

U. Alexis Johnson

Ambassador Bunker

William H. Sullivan

Robert J. McCloskey

Defense

David Packard

Daniel Z. Henkin

CIA

Richard Helms

[*name not declassified*]

JCS

Admiral Thomas Moorer

NSC Staff

Brig. Gen. A. M. Haig

Col. Richard T. Kennedy

John H. Holdridge

WH Staff

H. R. Haldeman

Ronald Ziegler

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. According to a chronology attached to a memorandum from Howe to Haig, February 9, the meeting ended at 12:22 p.m. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 84, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. IV) All brackets except those that indicate omission of unrelated material are in the original.

Mr. Kissinger: What is the kick-off time?

Admiral Moorer: The preliminary thrust will go at 7:00 PM;² the bulk will go at 9:00 PM.

Mr. Kissinger: Will there be much news?

Admiral Moorer: The SVN have placed an embargo.

Mr. Ziegler: When will it be lifted?

Mr. Kissinger: When Thieu speaks.

Admiral Moorer: For other reasons they slipped the announcement time.

Mr. Johnson: Berger says they changed the time because of time change on the kick-off.

Admiral Moorer: An A-6 dropped two bombs on Highway 9 which hit ARVN forces there. They killed 6 men. Otherwise everything is on track and all forces are in position. We are having some difficulty with the airfield but we have adequate helo loading and unloading facilities at Khe Sanh. The NVN are urging their forces to press ahead with truck movements of supplies. We had good air action against their trucks last night. The weather is satisfactory in objective area but there are low ceilings towards the coast which is typical for this time of year.

Mr. Kissinger: [to Helms] Your paper on the Binh Trams is a good one.³ It says that they are operating 500 trucks per night and are using 2400 total.

Admiral Moorer: They are still coming through the passes. We continue to go after them.

Mr. Helms: There have been no major troop movements in the area. They are putting their support troops in defensive posture.

Mr. Packard: Do we have anything on the reported flu epidemic?

Mr. Helms: About half of the troops get it annually.

Mr. Kissinger: Does it affect ours?

Mr. Helms: The ARVN may get it.

Admiral Moorer: I think they have been inoculated. It won't be as serious a problem for them as for the NVA.

² 7 p.m. Washington time was 8 a.m. Saigon time.

³ Apparent reference to a report on the importance of the Ho Chi Minh Trail that CIA sent to Kissinger under a February 6 covering memorandum which indicated that the paper had been prepared for Helms. It described the trail as the "vital life line" to South Vietnam and Cambodia and analyzed the logistics traffic through it. The paper concluded that due to the Cambodian operation in 1970 and weather delays in the DRV's restocking program during the dry season, a disruption of the DRV's current restocking effort would force them to delay any major offensives for a year. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 80, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam Operations in Laos and Cambodia, Vol. II)

Mr. Kissinger: Do we think that the support units will not fight well and are not mobile?

Admiral Moorer: Yes, they will play a fixed defensive role.

Mr. Helms: On Chup, we have had sharp fights in last 3 days.

Admiral Moorer: We are keeping Lamson as the name of the operation. It has three phases:

—1st about to start now

—2nd—exploitation

—3rd—withdrawal

Mr. Johnson: Laird called on the operation name. I put out a message to get Thieu to refer to Lamson.

Mr. Kissinger: There have been no unusual Peking–Moscow reactions?

Mr. Sullivan: They have been mild.

Mr. Johnson: Rogers saw Dobrynin at a party and he had no comment.

Mr. Kissinger: The PA scenario⁴ has gone out. We must slip it 3-1/2 to 4 hours.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, I have gone out with a Flash cable to advise our allies of the slipped time.

Mr. Kissinger: Who gets the message in France?

Mr. Johnson: Chaban will get it as a message for Pompidou who is in Africa.⁵ We will do this Sunday evening. They also know of the change in time.

Mr. Kissinger: As I understand it the PA scenario is that Thieu goes at 10:15, MACV at 10:45 and Henkin goes after MACV.

Mr. Henkin: Yes, that is correct. We will have reporters in the building at that time.

Mr. Kissinger: Shall we turn to the Questions and Answers?⁶

⁴ A draft of the Public Affairs Scenario, February 5, is *ibid.*, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-79, WSAG (Principals Only), Vietnam, 2/6/71.

⁵ In a February 7 memorandum to Nixon, Kissinger reported that Ambassador Watson had spoken with Prime Minister Chaban Delmas who was grateful for the advance notification. Chaban Delmas indicated he would inform President Pompidou and maintain secrecy. (*Ibid.*)

⁶ A list of questions and answers was in a memorandum Ziegler sent Kissinger, February 6, for use by government spokesmen following the announcement of the operation. Ziegler felt that when combined with the statements issued by Thieu, MACV, and the Defense Department, they would present the administration's policy credibly and forthrightly. (*Ibid.*)

Mr. Johnson: First I'd like to raise one other matter. Morning press stories might result from leaks from the Hill. We should hold our calls to Congress until later in the afternoon.

Mr. Ziegler: We can hold to our scenario this evening even if it leaks out of Saigon. I would expect AP and UPI to carry about 8:30 tonight.

Mr. Henkin: It will hold.

Mr. Johnson: I think there should be a release in the morning and it would be best if a single statement exists to which all could repair.

Mr. Kissinger: We may want to work on a statement and then put the question to the President about whether we should make it. It should be a departmental release to which spokesmen then could refer.

Mr. Kissinger: Now turning to the Q&As. The spokesmen can work out the details. But we don't want to have any discussion about our own deliberations or about the precise date when the decision was made.

Mr. Johnson: Would they use this material at briefings tomorrow?

Mr. Ziegler: We would try to get through by referring to the Thieu and other statements. If pressed by questions we would draw on these questions and answers.

Mr. Johnson: Would we straightarm?

Mr. Ziegler: No we can't do that. But we want to hold within limits.

Mr. McCloskey: We should limit our material to that needed to keep afloat and don't volunteer anything. We have to stand united on this.

Mr. Kissinger: But our objective is to keep the US out of it tomorrow. Therefore our answers should be kept to the absolute minimum.

Mr. Sullivan: Souvanna said that he would follow the statement by Thieu by 2 hours.

Mr. Kissinger: It would be a disaster if Souvanna speaks before Thieu.

Mr. Johnson: I will check with Godley on the plans for Souvanna's statement.

Mr. McCloskey: There will be lots of attention paid to the issue of consultation with Souvanna.

Mr. Holdridge: The Senate will be concerned. We won't be able to hold simply by saying that they should refer to Souvanna's statement. We may have to firmly deny or turn to the South Vietnamese.

Mr. Kissinger: Then it is agreed that Ziegler, Henkin and McCloskey will redo the Q&As in light of our discussion.

Mr. Johnson: I have a draft statement.⁷

Mr. Kissinger: Is it a good statement?

Mr. Johnson: If this could be put out, it would help.

Mr. Kissinger: We could just say that the Department of State issued it. I will take it up with the President. I believe this would be good. [All agree should keep reference to mission completed and delete last three lines of paragraph 4 of the draft.]

Mr. Helms: In paragraph 8 of the draft we should delete reference to "last evening."

Mr. Kissinger: [to Johnson] You would put the statement out about 9:00 AM?

Mr. Johnson: I will hold it until we are sure all other statements have been made.

Mr. Kissinger: Then if the President agrees, State will issue this as a Department statement. The Thieu statement to UN also will slip.

Mr. Johnson: We'll want to be sure of the timing.

Mr. Kissinger: USIA also will hold up and keep in low key.

Mr. Johnson: I will see that this is done.

Mr. Kissinger: Thank you. I think that covers everything for now. We will meet tomorrow at 10:30.

⁷ The approved State Department statement, which was released on February 8, is printed in the Department of State *Bulletin*, March 1, 1971, pp. 256–257.

Operation Lam Son 719, February 8–April 7, 1971

124. Minutes of a Meeting of the Senior Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, February 8, 1971, 10:35 a.m.

SUBJECT

Southeast Asia Dry Season Campaign

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	JCS
State	Admiral Thomas Moorer
U. Alexis Johnson	LTG John W. Vogt
William H. Sullivan	NSC Staff
Defense	Brig. Gen. A. M. Haig
David Packard	Colonel Richard T. Kennedy
Dennis Doolin	John H. Holdridge
CIA	WH Staff
Richard Helms	H. R. Haldeman
George Carver	

Mr. Johnson: Our Congressional briefings went very well.

Mr. Kissinger: Ziegler says that McCloskey is answering “no comment” to the question of whether Souvanna was consulted.

Mr. Johnson: I didn’t know this. I will check.

Admiral Moorer: (Briefed on movement of forces to date.) The operation is moving on schedule. Six units are in. We lost 4 US killed yesterday.

Mr. Kissinger: Will US losses increase?

Admiral Moorer: Possibly some but not beyond past levels. There will be ambushes. Several subsidiary moves are underway. Airlift into Laos is going ahead to begin setting up blocking positions and fire support bases. There have been 48 B-52 strikes in the past 12 hours. Some enemy forces—about 700 men—are moving toward Tchepone, also one regiment of the 2nd Division is moving west in NVN. One enemy reg-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. According to a chronology attached to a February 9 memorandum from Howe to Haig, the meeting ended at 11:17. (Ibid., Box 84, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. IV)

iment is moving from SVN into the Base 611 area. As to helo losses, there were three incidents. The crews on two were rescued; one crew is missing. The opposition so far has been light. We will have to ford the river at Tchepone. We estimate 72 hours to the intersection of routes 9 and 92 because of engineering work needed on the road.

Mr. Helms: It is not surprising that the enemy is moving west in NVN. It is only surprising that they didn't move earlier.

Admiral Moorer: They will take at least seven days to get there.

Mr. Kissinger: Will the ARVN move the feint force in mid week?

Admiral Moorer: Yes, they will move 7500 down the road with support on both sides. 2,500 will be flown in later.

Mr. Helms: When?

Admiral Moorer: Later in the week when the movement progresses.

Mr. Helms: There is no basic change in the enemy situation. He is preparing for combat and pushing supplies through on trucks.

Admiral Moorer: We have destroyed or damaged 262 trucks in the last 48 hours. (170 by gunship, 100 by fighters.) We had 52 sorties in North Laos, 587 in South Laos and 244 in Cambodia over the weekend. Chup is going well. There has been sharp fighting—about 300 NVN KIA, 26 ARVN KIA. The enemy is setting defenses up across the road. We have used 36 airlift sorties in Chup so far.

Mr. Helms: There has been no NVN or Pathet Lao reaction so far. Tass has played it as straight news.

Mr. Sullivan: We have a summary of foreign reaction.

Mr. Kissinger: I saw it and it is not bad.

Mr. Johnson: The Russian stress on the Chinese is interesting. The French reaction is about as expected.

Mr. Sullivan: We will wrap this up again later in the day.

Mr. Kissinger: The USSR is tougher on China than on the US. It is a great smokescreen for them.

Mr. Helms: Things are not going well in North Laos. We don't have an answer on the two Thai battalions yet.

Mr. Kissinger: We need an answer quickly.

Mr. Helms: I will get out to them again.

Mr. Kissinger: The Long Tieng situation has nothing to do with operation in South.

Mr. Johnson: On Congressional consultations, I don't have full details—but they seemed to go well. The Secretary suggested they hold fire "till they see what happens." Fulbright is quoted as saying he was not reached but the Secretary did reach him.

Mr. Sullivan: The Stanford daily is going to publish a favorable editorial.

Admiral Moorer: Rennie Davis² says there will be nationwide student demonstrations on Wednesday.

Mr. Johnson: The Souvanna statement was better than we expected. Thieu's statement was released here by the SVN Ambassador.³ The text was slightly different—more polished English.

Mr. Kissinger: Did Henkin go?

Mr. Packard: Yes, he was on the Today show.

Mr. Kissinger: How about Souvanna's Press Conference?

Mr. Johnson: No, he has not had it yet. The Department issued a statement.⁴

Mr. Kissinger: Has it gone out on VOA?

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Kissinger: Have we done the briefing for NATO and SEATO?

Mr. Johnson: SEATO was briefed; NATO will be today.

Mr. Kissinger: We need those contingency plans on a fall of Souvanna and an NVA move west.

Mr. Johnson: I have put them in the Lao Working Group.

Mr. Kissinger: OK—Please have the plans brought to the WSAG.

Mr. Carver: The Silver Buckle operations and the SGU upgrading effort will be supporting the ARVN operation.

Mr. Kissinger: Do we still think that most of the enemy supplies are north of Tchepone?

Mr. Helms: Yes.

Mr. Kissinger: Their crash effort won't change the situation before we get there?

Admiral Moorer and Mr. Helms: No.

Mr. Carver: We are working out plans for fire-fight simulations and are planting deception rumors also.

Mr. Johnson: At February 8 briefing the ARVN briefer indicated a possible SVN contact on the operation with the Laos Government.

² Rennie Davis was a prominent student protest leader and a leader of the Students for a Democratic Society.

³ The text was transmitted in circular telegram 21032, February 8, to all diplomatic and consular posts. Thieu broadcast it at 10 a.m. Washington time. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27 LAOS) The text of Thieu's message was published in *The New York Times*, February 8, 1971, p. 14.

⁴ See footnote 7, Document 123.

Mr. Sullivan: It was partly covered by the story that the SVN military contacted RLG military without Souvanna's knowledge.

Mr. Kissinger: I think we are pretty well up to date. Thank you. We will meet again tomorrow.

125. Minutes of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, February 9, 1971, 3:15 p.m.

SUBJECT

Military Operations in South Laos

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	CIA
State	Mr. Richard Helms
Amb. U. Alexis Johnson	Mr. George Carver
Amb. William Sullivan	JCS
Defense	Admiral Thomas Moorer
Mr. David Packard	Lt. Gen. John W. Vogt
Mr. Dennis Doolin	NSC Staff
	Mr. John H. Holdridge

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS²

Dr. Kissinger: (to Adm. Moorer and Gen. Vogt) I'd like you to tell us where we stand. Could you say something about the weather?

Gen. Vogt: I'll take up the weather first.

Adm. Moorer: It never rains in the operational area this time of year. In Khesanh at sunrise and sunset the visibility drops down to ½ mile, and this was the basis of the press reports about bad weather. The road into Khesanh is surfaced, so there is no supply problem. Once the helicopters are there in the operational area, they are in sunshine. TACAIR is radar controlled.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Nodis. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. According to Kissinger's Record of Schedule, the meeting ended at 4:37. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76)

² The original contains no text for the summary of conclusions.

Dr. Kissinger: Is this theory or practice?

Adm. Moorer: This is the way it's worked out. It is not true that the helicopters and TACAIR have been grounded. There is radar control for the TACAIR.

Dr. Kissinger: I saw reports this morning that the ARVN had been stopped, and where air support had been grounded. Were these reports from Saigon?

Adm. Moorer: The weather over Khesanh is pretty good now—I had an exchange of messages with General Abrams on this subject this morning.

Mr. Packard: General Cushman verifies the weather situation in Khesanh from his own experience.

Dr. Kissinger: I'm not criticizing the weather reports, I just want to know whether the ARVN has been stopped.

Gen. Vogt: In the last 24 hours there were 640 helicopter sorties for logistical support, 33 for medevac, and 44 for troop lift. On TACAIR, there were 30 B-52 sorties, 6 A-4, 2 F-4, and 3 B-57 sorties.

Adm. Moorer: There were over 1,000 air sorties all together.

Gen. Vogt: This was not very heavy, but there has been no real requirement yet.

Dr. Kissinger: There was no rainy weather?

Adm. Moorer: There has been rain, but not in the operating area. The troops are already in the area, where there is no rain.

Gen. Vogt: 6,200 troops are now inside Laos. They are moving along the road as fast as the engineers can repair it—resurfacing and cutting bushes, etc. Airborne units have been air-lifted onto Route 92, cutting the Ho Chi Minh Trail. This involved the 3rd Airborne Battalion, and the Brigade Headquarters. There have been no major engagements, but some trucks have been knocked off. The enemy has been picking at supply routes, but the U.S. and ARVN losses have been low. Four choppers were downed, but two were recovered. There is nothing to be alarmed about, and things are all on schedule. There are no indicators of any major enemy concentrations moving in.

Dr. Kissinger: How do you explain the lack of enemy reaction?

Adm. Moorer: The enemy doesn't have the mobility to get into position, and doesn't know what our plans are yet. However, once we get 15 miles in, we'll have plenty of reaction.

Mr. Helms: They're worried about an invasion near Vinh or from their backside. They are trying to force supplies down the Trail, and to do this must keep the Binh Trams in place to handle the traffic.

Gen. Vogt: The ARVN is now 12 miles deep into Laos.

Mr. Helms: If this were happening to us in reverse, we'd sure be sweating. They don't know who will be hit next.

Adm. Moorer: They have been using Route 92 as a main artery.

Gen. Vogt: Route 99 parallels Route 92, and they also hope to open up Route 23. However, this is open country, and can be worked over with TACAIR.

Amb. Sullivan: South of Route 9, Route 92 runs through narrow valleys and there are no alternative roads.

Adm. Moorer: It will take three to four days to get going. We don't want to rush things.

Dr. Kissinger: Are the ARVN units doing well, and fighting well?

Adm. Moorer: They are when they get a target. We expected the first 12–15 miles of road to be the most difficult part since the road had to be repaired.

Dr. Kissinger: When will the air drops come?

Adm. Moorer: When the ground forces are so far west that they will need these for support. We are giving consideration to carrying out a river crossing the other side of Tchepone. The ARVN would go for the airfield there.

Dr. Kissinger: Is there any civilian population in Tchepone?

Gen. Vogt: Zero. A couple of buildings are still standing, but the town has been bombed out.

Adm. Moorer: However, BT-33 is in the enemy vicinity, and this has truck parks and storage areas.

Dr. Kissinger: I saw reports that trucks have been turned back from BT-33.

Adm. Moorer: This is correct. The operation has already been well worthwhile.

Dr. Kissinger: The reports also said that they were ordering their units to put fragmentation bombs on all airfields.

Gen. Vogt: We achieved a major objective with the units on Route 92.

Dr. Kissinger: What's going on in the Chup area?

Adm. Moorer: Most of the action is on the periphery of the Chup plantation area and around Snuol. In one engagement 400 enemy were killed at a loss of 50 ARVN, though the pattern which we have been mostly following since February 4 has been sharp clashes between small units as the ARVN sweeps. We have found some supplies, and will find some more. The operation will continue until June 1, and will be a very deliberate sweep of the entire area. Whenever there is a sharp encounter, the ARVN comes out way ahead, as was the case for the Route 4 operation.

Gen. Vogt: We have reports that the 96th Regiment, consisting of artillery and sapper units, is moving out, probably because its rear area was cut off. The FANK caught up with it and killed 50.

Adm. Moorer: Earlier it was moving on the east side of the Mekong to threaten Phnom Penh, but now is pulling back.

Dr. Kissinger (to Mr. Helms): What can you tell us about enemy activities, Dick?

Mr. Helms: I'd like to mention two or three things. It is clear that the rush of enemy supplies is still above Tchepone. There was a report from BT-33 that 80 vehicles and 330 tons of supplies would be expected by the end of the month to transit Ban Karai. So if all goes well, our timing will be very useful.

Dr. Kissinger: A newsman asked me why the operation hadn't begun on January 1 when the supplies would have been greater. Someone in the Pentagon had spoken about this.

Mr. Helms: Our intelligence shows that the supplies coming down in November and December were for the enemy troops in the Panhandle, and that the real thing has only come since January.

Mr. Packard: The ARVN airborne division was also occupied in January.

Gen. Vogt: The Route 7 operation in Cambodia wound up in early December.

Amb. Sullivan: We didn't know until January that it was legal for us to engage in the sort of operation which is now taking place in south Laos.

Mr. Helms: I'd like to call attention to some interesting diplomatic facts of life—the Soviets are still attempting to maintain their role as a Geneva Co-chairman, and are disregarding Pathet Lao pleas for taking a stronger stand against us. Their attacks on us are no worse than usual, and their attacks on the Chinese are about the same thing, also.

Dr. Kissinger: Do you attach any importance to the fact that some Chinese broadcasts call this operation a threat to China?

Amb. Sullivan: Our Consulate in Hong Kong says that the Chinese response is "strong but measured," and notes that while Laos is a neighbor of China, there is no reason for the Chinese to feel threatened.

Dr. Kissinger: How did it go before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee?³

³ Rogers appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on February 8, accompanied by Green and Abshire.

Amb. Johnson: The results were excellent, and the Secretary came back very pleased.

Gen. Vogt: The Committee was almost friendly. Javits was the most outspoken. He wanted to know future plans, and said that the Committee should have some rights to chart our future course diplomatically. The Secretary side-stepped this. Fulbright said very little.

Amb. Johnson: Fulbright said he would say publicly it was the judgment of the President that the Laos operation was in the public interest.

Dr. Kissinger: Good for him. What about Symington?

Gen. Vogt: Symington said he had proposed the same thing three years ago, and thought the operation was a good move.

Mr. Helms: For once Symington feels that air power is being properly used.

Dr. Kissinger: What about Muskie?

Gen. Vogt: His reaction was moderate, and he asked factual questions. He had a great interest in enemy strengths, logistics flow, and requirements in South Vietnam and Cambodia. The Secretary stressed that the enemy was limited to a single lifeline. Muskie contended that guerrilla warfare doesn't take much in the way of supplies, and that terrorism could go on for years.

Amb. Johnson: Mansfield's pitch on moving westward didn't come up.

Gen. Vogt: This was preempted. I showed him the map with the routes, and that there were no longitudinal roads short of Route 13.

Amb. Johnson: He mentioned this to me yesterday.

Adm. Moorer: I had a session with Hebert⁴ and the House Armed Services Committee. I never attended a more friendly committee meeting—the whole group was very, very friendly, and in favor of the operation.

Amb. Johnson: Secretary Rogers was impressed with Senator Spong.⁵

Dr. Kissinger: When I think of the worries we had about Cambodia . . .

Amb. Johnson: The House Foreign Affairs Committee said it wasn't interested in a session.

⁴ Congressman Edward F. Hebert (D-LA), Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

⁵ Senator William B. Spong, Jr. (D-VA), member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Amb. Sullivan: Senator Case cautioned against losing Souvanna Phouma.

Gen. Vogt: The Secretary was asked by Case if the Laos operation was coordinated with Souvanna Phouma. The Secretary said that Souvanna Phouma had issued a public statement, but did not answer Case's question directly in his reply.

Amb. Sullivan: There wasn't one single remark from Senator McCarthy.

Amb. Johnson: There were a lot of other things in the news that afternoon—the Apollo 14 splashdown and the Los Angeles earthquake, which helped to divert attention.

Dr. Kissinger: Now did we come out on the Chup operation as compared to the Route 4 operation?

Mr. Helms: It was very clear that we had thought out all of the answers for press questions in advance.

Amb. Johnson: There was nothing there for the newsmen to discover.

Mr. Packard: There is something to be said about a news blackout.

Dr. Kissinger: Some say that the blackout was a master stroke. When we deny that it was done for this purpose here, they think it's just modesty.

Gen. Vogt: One question to consider regarding newsmen is, "What about when the South Vietnamese go into North Vietnam?"

Dr. Kissinger: What is the status of the PT-boat operations?⁶

Gen. Vogt: These are scheduled for tonight.

Adm. Moorer: There are two separate operations: a PTF will strike coastal shipping in North Vietnam, and an amphibious feint will take place tomorrow. This will be Thursday and Friday⁷ their time. The amphibious operation is for deception, but the PT operation will be the real McCoy.

Dr. Kissinger: Are there any other reactions from our foreign friends which we should consider?

Amb. Johnson: Pompidou and U Thant called it "deplorable" that the South Vietnamese and "others" had moved into Laos.

⁶ Reference is an operation, set forth in memorandum CM-567-71 from Moorer to Laird, February 5, to use PTF boats with South Vietnamese crews and CIA command and control and radio in the Philippines to communicate with MACV, to attack the North Vietnamese coast and ships in order to force the DRV to divert resources from Laos. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 80, Vietnam Subject Files, Viet Operations in Laos and Cambodia, Vol. II) Pursley forwarded Moorer's memorandum to Haig under a covering note, February 5. (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330-76-197, Box 66, Indochina 381)

⁷ February 11 and 12.

Dr. Kissinger: Why do we have to take this from U Thant?

Amb. Johnson: We asked him whether “others” would include North Vietnamese, and he said yes.

Amb. Sullivan: The Canadians have called for an ICC investigation, which is o.k. with us. The Indians came out with another one of their deplorable statements. We should go back to them and tell them to do their ICC duty.

Dr. Kissinger: Dick, what’s happening in north Laos?

Mr. Helms: In north Laos, two battalions of Thai SGUs can move to Long Tieng between the 15th and the 19th (BIs 603 and 604) provided we decide now what pay scale can go into effect. The difference in pay scale between Thai regulars and irregulars has caused problems. The Thai have recommended that the irregular pay should go up, and the regular pay down, in which case the U.S. comes out ahead by \$1 million per year.

Mr. Packard: That’s o.k. by me.

Amb. Sullivan: Unger has already said that this should be approved.

Mr. Helms: If you say it’s approved, you can get a bonus.

Dr. Kissinger: Let’s do it.

Adm. Moorer: There was a three-plane B-52 strike on the west edge of the Plain of Jars today.

Amb. Johnson: On that, I was going to suggest a brief report from Bill Sullivan, who had a meeting of his working group. (To Gen. Vogt): are strikes authorized to be carried out without reference to Washington?

Gen. Vogt: No, Secretary Laird has not approved this.

Dr. Kissinger: I’ll speak to the President about that.

Amb. Sullivan: I had a session with the working group on contingency planning in which three levels of possible concern were laid out: enemy continuation of hostilities in north Laos at about the present level; some step-up in enemy hostilities and diplomatic pressures; and a major change in the enemy’s whole pattern of operations in Laos, diplomatically and politically. Each of these must be considered in terms of our military and diplomatic responses. From the map, it appears that our first area of concern is Luang Prabang. The general situation seems to be that the Communist forces are there not in greater numbers, but are closer.

Dr. Kissinger: We have defensive forces there, don’t we?

Mr. Helms: Yes, but these will not be adequate if the North Vietnamese attack in strength.

Amb. Sullivan: The airfield is on one side of the river and the town on the other, so that the airfield is vulnerable. This will be a problem if we need to evacuate U.S. personnel.

Dr. Kissinger: How many U.S. personnel are there?

Amb. Sullivan: Less than 100. We have helicopters which are left there overnight. I have asked Godley about the status of the King,⁸ who is the main concern.

Amb. Johnson: If the airfield becomes unusable, we will form chop-pads throughout the city. This will take about two weeks.

Amb. Sullivan: We have to go back to Vientiane on forming concrete plans for evacuating the King and the Royal Family. On the Long Tieng–Sam Thong front, two more battalions of Thais will be moved in between the 14th and the 19th. We also have a problem of civilian refugees—10,000 have left Long Tieng in good order and are now on a ridge line about seven miles south. They are adopting a wait-and-see attitude.

Dr. Kissinger: Has AID finished that road into Long Tieng?

Amb. Sullivan: It's finished except for one gap.

Dr. Kissinger: Why is AID building the road through at this time?

Amb. Sullivan: It was conceived four years ago when the situation looked good, but was actually stopped last year. A big gap exists across the river.

Dr. Kissinger: Are we making sure that it is not being continued?

Amb. Sullivan: We can make sure about this.

Dr. Kissinger: Are we still expecting an attack on Long Tieng?

Mr. Carver: Yes, within the next several days. The enemy is carrying out probing and harassing actions.

Amb. Sullivan: This is the area of maximum concern, where we want the freest hand. We will need first to move in the two new battalions, then take care of the refugees, next get a free hand in the use of B-52s against areas calibrated by the MSQ radar, and finally get a handle on the monthly ceiling on air operations in this area. The JCS has reported back on NSDM 77⁹ and had discussed a ceiling of 14,000 TACAIR sorties per month, which can't be exceeded.

⁸ In telegram 21613 to Vientiane, February 9, the Department asked Godley to consult King Savang Vatthana to find out if he were amenable to a U.S. plan to evacuate him and key members of the Royal family from Luang Prabang "should necessity arise." (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 15-1 LAOS) Godley responded in telegram 777 from Vientiane, February 9, that he was uncertain whether the issue was raised with the King and that he doubted that the Lao had any plans to ensure the King's safety. (Ibid.)

⁹ Document 20.

Dr. Kissinger: If there is a request for authorization of a surge, I know that the President will authorize it. If there are people who are opposed, I will get a decision but I know what his answer will be. We can get it settled right here.

Gen. Vogt: There is additional capacity beyond 14,000 sorties.

Dr. Kissinger: We should assume that this will be necessary. If we need a new NSDM, I can get this done. If we don't do it here, the President will. If you want, I will send in a memorandum to the President and see how he responds.

Amb. Sullivan: According to the JCS memorandum, an increase can take place only with SecDef's approval.

Dr. Kissinger: Is there a problem on exceeding 14,000?

Mr. Packard: There is no question on getting the authority; there is only a question of what assets are on hand.

Adm. Moorer: We must change the instructions to Abrams, who won't order an increase without them.

Mr. Packard: We have contingency funds to cover an increase.

Mr. Doolin: A request has gone to CINCPAC and CIA for an estimate of what operational levels will be needed for the next 16 months.

Dr. Kissinger: If we have the resources, we should go ahead. I can take this to the President.

Mr. Packard: That won't be necessary.

Amb. Sullivan: Other Washington action will be needed on giving Godley and Abrams the freedom to hold B-52 operations without coming back.¹⁰ The three problems are air support, the new battalions, and the refugees. Vientiane remains calm.

Dr. Kissinger: Have the Lao said anything?

Amb. Sullivan: Not much. In south Laos, if the North Vietnamese start to move across Route 9 to Muong Phine and Muong Hene, I have asked for a study of what resources are available to put in a blocking force, both regular and irregular. My first thought is that I don't expect the North Vietnamese to come so far west, but just up to the ridge line. West of there, they have no logistics. (Admiral Moorer: They would also be out in the open.) If needed, BV-31, BT-19, and BV-201 could be brought in from Seno and BP-101 and others from elsewhere.

Dr. Kissinger: Do the Lao have transport planes?

¹⁰ In memorandum CM-566-71 to Laird, February 6, Moorer recommended that Godley and Abrams be allowed to bypass obtaining approval for B-52 strikes in northern Laos from the Chairman of the JCS and Secretary of Defense and seek only CINCPAC's concurrence, with the JCS having potential to veto. According to a handwritten note on the memorandum, Laird disapproved the request. (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330-76-197, Box 69, Laos 385.1)

Amb. Sullivan: Yes. Interestingly enough, some of their pilots were trained by the French. There are other Lao ground forces. CAS has about 2,000 more in Souvannaket. In Thailand there is one RCT in Ubon and one RCT in Korat which would physically come, but the question is: could we legally pay for these forces? If we assume that their function would be to establish a line of communications on the Thai side, we could justify it.

Amb. Johnson: If Tchepone was legal and this is in support of Tchepone, then it should be legal too.

Amb. Sullivan: We could also justify the move in terms of stopping infiltration.

Mr. Doolin: We'll check this out with our General Counsel.

Dr. Kissinger: We don't really expect the North Vietnamese to do this, do we? It would be a fantastic endeavor for them to establish a LOC that close to the Thai border.

Adm. Moorer: I hope they do so—we would put in the South Vietnamese.

Amb. Sullivan: The next question in the south concerns the Bolovens. If the Lao operation against Route 92 should slow the North Vietnamese down, they might launch attacks against our bases at PS-22¹¹ and PS-26, and open Route 23 to Paksong, because from Paksong they could then transit the Bolovens. The response from the field has been that Lam Son 719 will reduce and not increase the threat to the Route 92 operation. However, as a contingency one battalion of Khmer Krom and one regular Khmer battalion might be brought in. Sisouk has visited Lon Nol on this, and Lon Nol agreed. The JCS is reluctant about this, though. There is a legal question about the use of MASF funds for the Khmer retrained at Long Hai. CIA doesn't particularly want to take on this operation.

Dr. Kissinger: Why is CIA reluctant?

Mr. Helms: Lon Nol hasn't designated the battalions yet.

Amb. Sullivan: I told Swank that as a result of Lam Son 719, he should move more rapidly on this.

Dr. Kissinger: What good would these Khmer units do?

Me. Helms: Nothing at this time.

Amb. Sullivan: They would go into the Bolovens. One thing would be compelling: if we put two Khmer battalions into Ban Houay Sai, we could take the two Thai battalions out of there and put them in Long Tieng.

Mr. Carver: We're getting two other Thai battalions into Long Tieng, and these shouldn't be mixed up.

¹¹ Pakse Site (PS)

Amb. Sullivan: As a worst case on the refugee problem, we need \$1.5 million more, and in any case \$200,000 more, and should put in a few more AID personnel out there. If we evacuate the Meo and put them in Sayaboury as a last resort, we would never get them back. The only other thing we need to discuss is the diplomatic scenario. The Canadians have asked for ICC action . . .

Dr. Kissinger: I have one other question on the military situation. If things really go bad in Long Tieng, is there another Thai RCT to put there?

Amb. Sullivan: There are RCTs in Ubon and Korat, but perhaps the Thai wouldn't want to put them in.

Mr. Helms: Other RCTs are on track.

Ambassador Sullivan: The attack on Long Tieng should begin in the next two or three days.

Adm. Moorer: They're about three weeks ahead of last year's schedule.

Dr. Kissinger: Was this schedule fixed some weeks ago?

Mr. Carver: Yes, they could turn it up a bit, but it was actually laid on some months back. There were signs of an offensive as early as October and November of last year, and the enemy probably felt that north Laos was vulnerable.

Amb. Sullivan: I have one last problem. I had a back channel from Godley about the 1040 ceiling.¹² He doesn't know if this is fixed or flexible; if flexible, he would like to have additional people there, but if fixed, he wants an adjustment in the ceiling.

Dr. Kissinger: Can we send people in on TDY? That's what we're doing in Phnom Penh.

Mr. Doolin: Godley has said he could live with 1100. It's o.k. on the military side, but he needs additional civilians.

Amb. Sullivan: He wants six more requirements officers immediately.

Dr. Kissinger: Can we see if we can do this within the 1040 ceiling by assigning them on TDY?

Amb. Sullivan: The 1040 figure includes those on TDY.

Dr. Kissinger: The President said in his statement that's what we had there then.¹³ I don't recall that the figure was fixed. I'm sure that what the President intended was to explain exactly what was in there. If the figure was tripled, he would have concern, but I can't believe

¹² Not found.

¹³ Nixon issued a statement on Laos, March 6, 1970, in which he asserted that there were 1,040 Americans, both U.S. Government and contract employees, in Laos. The text is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pp. 244–249.

that adjusting from 1040 to 1100 would cause trouble. Read the statement carefully, please. The President didn't intend to fix the number forever.

Mr. Packard: DOD just got rid of manpower ceilings.

Dr. Kissinger: We'll check the text and as long as we are staying within a few percent, I wouldn't worry.

Mr. Doolin: Godley doesn't want military people, just a few civilians.

Dr. Kissinger: Just check the statement to see that there are no problems.

Amb. Sullivan: I have come into this group with request for decisions on the personnel ceiling, TACAIR, refugees, B-52s, and funding the RCTs. We can defer a decision about the Khmer coming in.

Mr. Helms: Anyway, I want to check some questions about the status of the Khmer.

Dr. Kissinger: Can you let me know at the next meeting?

Mr. Helms: Yes.

Amb. Sullivan: We also should check on the position of the King (of Laos).

Dr. Kissinger: Sometime you must explain the King's position to me. How old is he?

Amb. Sullivan: Three years younger than Souvanna Phouma. This would make him 63–65.

Dr. Kissinger: Is the position hereditary?

Amb. Sullivan: Yes, he is descended from the first king and Souvanna from the second king. Souvanna regards his position as somewhat hereditary too.

Dr. Kissinger: You've done a first-class job on the contingency paper.¹⁴ It's really outstanding.

¹⁴ Not found.

126. Minutes of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, February 10, 1971, 11 a.m.

SUBJECT

Military Operations in South Laos and North Laos

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman—Dr. Henry A. Kissinger

State

Amb. U. Alexis Johnson

Amb. William Sullivan

Defense

Mr. Dennis Doolin

JCS

Adm. Thomas Moorer

CIA

Mr. Richard Helms

Mr. George Carver

NSC

Gen. Alexander M. Haig

Mr. John H. Holdridge

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS²

Dr. Kissinger: Is it raining or not? I'd appreciate a weather report so that we can all understand what's going on.

Adm. Moorer: The latest report we have is as of 0230Z, that is, 10:30 last night our time, so that this refers to the situation around noon Vietnam time. We don't have a report for the rest of the day. Fog was reported then, but helicopter insertions were made. We sometimes have a situation where fire support bases on a hilltop may be clear, but it's foggy down on the ground. The fog usually burns off by mid-morning. The prognosis now is that the clouds will decrease. There is good weather to the west, and 239 sorties were carried out, but right along the border there is low visibility from time to time, although this is not

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Nodis. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. According to Kissinger's Record of Schedule, the meeting ended at 12:11 p.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76)

² The original contains no text for the summary of conclusions.

critical. Running on our side of the border, it is more difficult to run along Route 9. This is being taken care of. There is some delay in establishing fire support bases, but we are not trying to rush in—this is an orderly process. Abe thinks the operation is going well, and that the South Vietnamese are showing excellent professionalism.

Dr. Kissinger: Is there anything in the CBS report to the effect that there is an embargo on US casualty reports?

Adm. Moorer: Casualty reports are being regularly released once a week.

Dr. Kissinger: Can we say that casualties are being reported in the normal way, and that there are no restrictions?

Adm. Moorer: Yes.

Amb. Sullivan: This week's report will be released tonight, and there will be 24 killed.

Dr. Kissinger: Are the Laotian figures being folded into the Vietnam figures? Will they be folded in next week? What about helicopter losses?

Adm. Moorer: We always mention helicopter losses, and will have all casualties for all Indochina. These will not be identified as having been in Laos or any particular place.

Dr. Kissinger: Couldn't we treat all our losses the same? I would prefer not to separate any of them out.

Amb. Johnson: The press will hound us for Laotian casualties.

Amb. Sullivan: We could report losses on a daily basis, including helicopter losses, and casualties in Laos and Cambodia. I'll take this up at the Friday² meeting of the Ad Hoc Group.

Dr. Kissinger: I would appreciate a recommendation on Friday, but I have no fixed views, except I want to be able to state that we can categorically deny that there is an embargo on casualties and that we are reporting exactly as we have been reporting prior to the Laotian operation. Where are we militarily?

Adm. Moorer: The North Vietnamese are moving reinforcements from the north across Highway 9. We have reports of 2400 and 1200 men. This raises the enemy total to 19,000 in the whole area, all of whom are combat troops.

Dr. Kissinger: This doesn't worry us?

Adm. Moorer: No. Abe has said our forces are at the intersection of Routes 9 and 92, and that the road is open all the way from the Laotian border with ground forces supporting. Two more fire support bases

² February 12.

have been inserted. The road from the intersection west is in very good shape, since this has been part of their main route. When we decide to go into Tchepone, we'll watch the weather and wait until the best conditions develop. The operation is going on schedule, and is very satisfactory.

Mr. Helms: What is showing up north of Route 9 is the equivalent of a North Vietnamese division. That's what we want—to give them a pasting. They want to put harassing fire on the gorges along Route 9 and make it difficult for us to move up. The enemy unit is the 320th Division.

Dr. Kissinger: Are we bombing?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. We are using B-52s there at every opportunity. There are now people on the ground and we are getting much better information.

Dr. Kissinger: Will they attempt to pick up a fire support base?

Adm. Moorer: They may try, as they did at Khesanh. Their tactic is to close in at night and rush the friendly positions.

Mr. Carver: Most casualties in Chup were suffered this way.

Adm. Moorer: At Khesanh, they rushed several times, but we bombed them with B-52s. It's beginning to shape up into a pattern on their side—they're reacting by giving wild instructions to the Binh Trams to move and pull back. They have been disrupted. Chup is going fine, with a number of encounters. A regiment in the vicinity of Snuol directed an attack against the ARVN, several clashes ensued, and they came off the worse. A lot of the Chup plantation area is burning. The operation is moving from the west to the northeast side. We'll have a series of clashes—50 today or 70 tomorrow, and they'll be decimated, particularly if they don't get supplies. We have found some small caches.

Mr. Helms: We had had confirmation that 'flu is taking hold among North Vietnamese troops in the Panhandle. An intercept spoke of a "rapidly deteriorating health situation" within one unit.

Amb. Sullivan: Have the ARVN troops been inoculated?

Adm. Moorer: I don't know. We'll check, but I imagine that they have been inoculated.

Dr. Kissinger: Have we stopped the enemy supply offensive?

Amb. Sullivan and Mr. Helms: No, they are relocating truck traffic to Route 23 and moving through Muong Phine.

Mr. Helms: There has been no drop-off at all.

Amb. Sullivan: When they get to where Route 16 intercepts the Se Kong, they are literally under the guns of PS-22, which maintains 24-hour coverage. For this reason, PS-22 is a prime NVA target.

Dr. Kissinger: The enemy can get supplies over?

Amb. Sullivan: And troops. However, we blew the bridge at the Se Dong River.

Mr. Helms: The enemy can't be enjoying it.

Dr. Kissinger: What about the total tonnage in the system?

Mr. Carver: The bulk of the serious supplies for the enemy's southern forces are still north of Tchepone.

Adm. Moorer: Last night there were truck kills both north and south of Tchepone.

Amb. Sullivan: North Vietnamese broadcasts began last night to show concern over attacks against their own territory north of the DMZ. Ky has said publicly that this is the best place to attack.

Adm. Moorer: They're worried about an amphibious operation.

Dr. Kissinger: Have there been any political reactions?

Amb. Sullivan: There was a message from Souvannavong to Souvanna, which didn't blame him but rather the US and South Vietnamese, and saying that the PL would resist with all its forces. Souvanna was asked to intercede. This message was significant because it showed that they are not abandoning the Geneva Agreement of 1962. Minin (the Soviet Ambassador in Vientiane) went to Luang Prabang to see the King, and Tass put out another statement about the British having prostituted their co-chairman role by supporting the US. The Canadian Minister here passed to me the instructions which the Canadians have sent to their missions, which were to get the ICC into Tchepone to investigate. I was also given a copy of the Indian declaration, which contained a lot of prize words, but wasn't very helpful. The Indians should put their money where their mouth is. I heard from Habib, who says there is no sign of any postponement in the talks. Some demonstrations have taken place in various capitals.

On actions with regard to Laos, we have sent a cable to Vientiane about evacuating the King.³ We have also drafted a joint State/Defense message regarding the personnel ceilings in Laos. Are we still in agreement on having flexibility between 1040 and 1100 people?

Dr. Kissinger: We'll clear the message. I mentioned this to the President, who had no trouble.

Amb. Sullivan: What about giving authority to the people in the field on Arc Light?

Adm. Moorer: We will straighten this out with Packard.

Mr. Helms: We had a message from Godley which contained a lot of advice on what should be done to deal with the North Laos situa-

³ See footnote 8, Document 125.

tion. We told our Station in Vientiane to stand back and get shut of the tactical situation, and to look at Long Tieng objectively to see what can be done.

Dr. Kissinger: Are there any other problems?

Mr. Doolin: Secretary Laird has already lifted the ceilings, and Mr. Packard wants to assure the group that Defense will do everything that is needed.

Dr. Kissinger: What does this mean?

Adm. Moorer: We are writing a message now, and will take care of the personnel limits.

Amb. Sullivan: One of the things that Godley was pointing out in his message is that he would like an increase in sorties allocated to the Raven FACs. The problem is that only a small percentage of TACAIR missions are flown without a designated target even if a more lucrative target can be developed by a sortie. A certain number of sorties are assigned to a Raven, who orders a strike against what he considers a lucrative target. However, the 7th Air Force doesn't want to designate sorties to the Raven but prefers to frag in Saigon against designated targets. It would be better to give control to the Raven FACs, since the other targets may be as much as 72-hours old.

Dr. Kissinger: What about that? It seems like good sense to me.

Adm. Moorer: We will work this out, positively.

Amb. Sullivan: One other thing from Godley—the situation is improving in Long Tieng. They have pulled T-28s out of the line from Luang Prabang, and L-19s too, from sunset to dawn in order to get more sorties. One other matter. What about the pay for the Thai RCTs if they go into Laos?

Mr. Doolin: If the RCTs move into Laos as regular forces, we can't pay them. We have no authority, and can only pay for local forces. But we could pay if the RCTs were converted into SGUs. Also, we can support Vietnamese moving from the direction of Vietnam, but not the other way. Sierra Romeo can be paid as on-going, but the 13th RCT is now carried on the books as a SGU.

Mr. Helms: This is a little fiction which we are carrying on.

Amb. Sullivan: If the Thai RCTs were shifted to SGUs, I assume that Dick Helms would pay them through switchback from Defense funds.

Mr. Doolin: The greatest danger now with Proxmire⁴ taking over is of being accused of violating Congressional actions. The 13th RCT

⁴ Senator William Proxmire (D-WI), member of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

is o.k. because it was put in before the legislation. The cost for the new RCT would be \$3 million per month each.

Dr. Kissinger: For operations along Route 9?

Mr. Doolin: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: What do we have in Long Tieng in the way of Thai troops?

Mr. Helms: Three infantry battalions and two artillery battalions, with two SGUs about to go.

Dr. Kissinger: One other question—should we move the Thai RCTs to the border as a warning?

Amb. Sullivan: There would be a logistics problem. They are now in Ubon and Korat where they can function. On the border where there are no base or housing facilities it would be more difficult.

Mr. Helms: The regular Thai army has almost zero mobility. Whenever a move is needed, the US has to do the moving.

Amb. Johnson: Moreover, when the Thai regulars leave their garrisons, they must be paid per diem.

Amb. Sullivan: If a surge comes across Route 9, they can be moved then.

Dr. Kissinger: What could the enemy accomplish by moving westward?

Mr. Helms: It would be more likely for the enemy to curve back up north.

Amb. Sullivan: I think the enemy will give more emphasis to Route 23. This raises the question of getting Cambodian SGUs in to help out the situation.

Dr. Kissinger: Aren't we planning to cut Route 23? When will this be done?

Adm. Moorer: That's Phase II of the irregular operation. We will fly the SGUs in, going from Route 911 to Route 23.

Dr. Kissinger: Are they using Route 23 now?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. In January we ambushed a hell of a lot of them going through Route 23. They have added a second lane to the road from Muong Phine to Route 23.

Dr. Kissinger: What about Cambodian battalions?

Mr. Helms: Last fall, in September or October, Lon Nol rounded up a bunch of recruits, whom we sent to PS-18 to get them trained up gradually. A second battalion, which had been rounded up on the streets of Phnom Penh, mutinied and was sent back. Since then, work has been done to recruit another battalion. Three hundred and thirty men of this group are beginning training at PS-18. The first battalion is now on the Bolovens, but performing poorly. We can't get any more

recruits. That's the situation about Cambodian troops up to now. However, Sisouk went to Phnom Penh and said afterwards that Lon Nol had promised one Khmer Krom battalion and one Long Hai battalion. He reported this to Godley, but there has been no other source.

Amb. Sullivan: No. Lon Nol told Swank about this at the time that Lam Son 719 began.

Mr. Helms: But Lon Nol hasn't designated the units, and now he is flat on his back.⁵

Dr. Kissinger: However, he hasn't lost his mental capacity.

Amb. Sullivan: Somebody should go back to Phnom Penh and ask what Lon Nol had in mind. Who should do this. Swank or the CIA.

Amb. Johnson: We can do this through State channels.⁶

Amb. Sullivan: We'll ask Ladd.

Dr. Kissinger: Do we all agree that if two battalions can be identified, they should be moved in?

Mr. Helms: Yes, this was all in the plan.

Dr. Kissinger: Will Sullivan take care of identifying the units?

Amb. Sullivan: Yes, we'll ask Swank.

Dr. Kissinger: What are the facts about US forces on the ground in Laos?

Amb. Johnson: Freidheim said yesterday that US forces could go into Laos to rescue downed chopper pilots.

Adm. Moorer: We did go into Laos to recover a helicopter.

Dr. Kissinger: Please get the facts for me, Tom. What about Lon Nol's request to go to Hawaii?

Amb. Johnson: Let me read Phnom Penh's 599.⁷

Dr. Kissinger: Didn't he get the word about keeping Lon Nol in the country?

Amb. Johnson: We were going to go out discouraging his leaving the country, but this was overtaken by events.

Dr. Kissinger: Once he is in a US military hospital, it will be tougher for him to get back.

⁵ In telegram 564 from Phnom Penh, February 8, the Embassy reported that Lon Nol had suffered a serious stroke that paralyzed his left side and that the GKR did not intend to make a public statement about the situation. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 511, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. XII) Kissinger sent a memorandum to Nixon on February 9 indicating that the Embassy would not know for several weeks if Lon Nol would be able to resume his duties. (Ibid.)

⁶ In telegram 657 from Phnom Penh, February 13, Swank reported that the GKR had been contemplating recruiting men for the Laos operation was fulfilling its pledges to the RLG at a leisurely pace. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, DEF 6 CAMB)

⁷ Not found.

Amb. Johnson: It would have been better for him to go to Bangkok, where there are excellent facilities.

Dr. Kissinger: My worry is his being labeled as an American stooge.

Mr. Doolin: One of the best neurologists in the world is at Bangkok, in the Rockefeller Hospital.

Dr. Kissinger: It's my strong instinctive sense, first, that he should not leave the country; secondly, that we shouldn't have him in a US military hospital; and, thirdly, he should not be in the continental US. Taking him to Hawaii seems wrong to me.

Adm. Moorer: Once you take him past Saigon, he might as well go all the way.

Amb. Johnson: We'll go back to Phnom Penh and Saigon on this, and then go out to Bangkok about his acceptability.

Dr. Kissinger: Could we give the flavor in these messages of deliberately keeping him in the country?

Amb. Sullivan: Yes, we'll get together and get out a message.

Dr. Kissinger: I believe Bangkok is the best place.

Adm. Moorer: If necessary, we can augment the medical facilities there with our own.

Dr. Kissinger: If another meeting is needed, you can get together with Al Haig in my absence toward the end of next week.

127. **Diary Entry by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)**¹

Washington, February 12, 1971.

[Omitted here is material unrelated to the Laos and Cambodian operations.]

1220

Received telephone call from Dr. Kissinger who said that he had just been with the President who is agonizing over a number of things. First is the ABC report last night, alleging that a dead US soldier in a South Vietnamese uniform was brought out of Laos in a helicopter.

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Moorer Diary, July 1970–July 1974. Top Secret.

Told Kissinger that I could not conceive of this being true but that I would send out a message and follow through.

The President wants to be sure that no American television or news correspondents ride on American helicopters. The President also wants to start discouraging the South Vietnamese from taking them on board their helicopters.² We should clamp down on it slowly so that it does not become too obvious. The President feels we can not gain anything from having reporters and news men running loose in the battle zone sending back all these gory pictures of people being wounded. If they did the same thing for automobile accidents, I am sure we could get people to stop driving also.

The President also wanted Kissinger to check with me to find out how the operation is going. The President wants to be sure that I understand how much we have riding on this one and Kissinger had told him he didn't have to confirm that because I knew. I told Kissinger that the operation seems to be going satisfactorily without question. I think, however, that there is going to be some fighting soon because of the way the North Vietnamese are posturing themselves. We know they are having a bad time with their supplies and that they are already trying to readjust their system and reroute the trucks and things of that sort. Some of the North Vietnamese are complaining that they have not received certain supplies but the operation is still in the initial stages. Told Kissinger that when I talked to McCain last night about midnight he pointed out to me that the roads that the ARVN are proceeding along east of 92 have very deep ruts to be filled up and this is one of the causes of their problem. However the ARVN are managing all right and are on the western side of the intersection. The weather is good so we will see much more air activity now which will be helpful.

Kissinger then asked if we are getting at the trucks and I replied that we did very well last night and reiterated that the operation is going very satisfactorily. However, by the nature of this operation it will be a series of isolated contacts and we have to judge the operation over all by the cumulative effect that we see. The people in the field are satisfied. We will have the airfield at Khe Sanh in good shape by Sunday³ and this will have an impact on the logistics and will help to alleviate some of the problems with the muddy roads.

Kissinger then asked if Abrams was aware that our big objective was to stop the supplies and that we are not as interested in body count as we are the supplies. I told him that Abrams does know that and that this was the plan to start with. But at the same time the ARVN are establishing

² Moorer highlighted this sentence in the margin.

³ February 14.

positions so that they will be in a strong posture as they move across the panhandle. Therefore I think they are moving more or less deliberately and in very careful fashion so they do not get caught out on a limb. But Abrams does understand what the problem is. However, I will talk to him. Kissinger then asked if I expected holdups which will result in the supplies getting past Tchepone. I said certainly some have already gotten past Tchepone but I think Helms overplays this thing a little bit and actually the majority of the supplies have not gone south.

I told Kissinger that I see indications that the North Vietnamese are trying to move to the west to Highway 23 but this will take time to reorganize and direct. At the same time the air activity at night is being pursued to the maximum. The weather is good now and it might be good for two or three days and this will be very helpful.

Kissinger then observed that the PTF operation went well and asked if we could do another one. I replied that we could. Kissinger said that is what the President would like to do. I told Kissinger that we were going to recommend it right away and we were preparing a paper along those lines. Kissinger asked if they could hit some shore installations the next time and I replied that they could. I told Kissinger that apparently they ran out of ammunition before they reached their shore targets on the last run. I told him that he should bear in mind that this is the first time they have done this on their own and that they did very well. Kissinger said that the North Vietnamese have really squawked about it.

Then Kissinger asked about Abrams' mood. I told him that Abrams was up in Military Region I yesterday and that his mood is good. He thinks we are doing okay. He really went up there to check on the road.

Note to the Diary: Subsequent to this telephone conversation, I released a message to McCain and Abrams asking for the feasibility of follow-on operations which would complement and capitalize on the current on-going operations in Laos and Cambodia. (Copy attached.)⁴

[Omitted here is material unrelated to the Laos and Cambodian operations.]

⁴ Attached but not printed is a draft message to McCain and Abrams, undated.

128. Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, February 12, 1971, 6 p.m.

SUBJECT

Military Situation in North and South Laos and Public Line Regarding Certain South Vietnamese Operations

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman—Brig Gen. Alexander M. Haig	State
Defense	Mr. John N. Irwin
Mr. David Packard	Amb. William Sullivan
Mr. Dennis Doolin	Mr. Robert J. McCloskey
Mr. Daniel Henkin	NSC
JCS	Mr. John H. Holdridge
Adm. Thomas Moorer	Mr. Robert C. Houdek
Lt. Gen. John W. Vogt	
CIA	
Lt. Gen. Robert E. Cushman	
Mr. George Carver	

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. The Group agreed to deny any knowledge of South Vietnamese seaborne operations north of the DMZ against North Vietnamese shipping.

2. A position on U.S. SAR operations in support of downed U.S. helicopters and crews in south Laos was agreed upon. This had been drafted by Mr. Henkin.

3. It was noted that while we might be vulnerable to charges that the south Laos operation had caused the enemy to launch this north Laos attack, no criticisms on this had yet developed.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. According to a February 16 memorandum for the record by Doolin, the meeting ended at 7:10. (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330-76-207, Box 4, 334 WSAG)

129. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, February 14, 1971.

SUBJECT

General Abrams' Report on Laos Operation

We asked General Abrams for his assessment to get a feel for how the operation was going and what difficulties there might be. General Abrams has given us a detailed reply (Tab A).² The specific items on which we asked Abrams' views and a summary of his reply follow.

1. *Comparison of actual ARVN troop movements and time phasing with the original plan.* Execution has been more deliberate than envisioned because:

a) General Lam is insuring adequate flank security for establishing fire support bases

b) Roads in Laos were in worse condition than expected

c) General Lam was assuring protection of his lines of communication against contingencies of bad weather and enemy interdiction.

2. *Any changes in objectives.* Time phasing has been extended for reasons noted above and President Thieu has directed additional effort on Routes intersecting Route 9 to destroy enemy supplies in these areas. The principal objective remains the disruption of base area 604 and cutting of the enemy line of communication. The ARVN control of Route 92 achieved this objective in part.

3. *ARVN performance to date.* General Abrams considers it very good and professional.

4. *Intensity and effect of enemy resistance.* It has been continuous and about as expected. Early contact with two enemy regiments, however, led to General Lam's decision to bolster his flank security. Five enemy regiments are in the area and one more could reinforce in 48 hours.

5. *Estimate of when ARVN will establish blocking position across enemy supply lines.* Route 92 is already blocked; routes through and west of Tchepone will be blocked in about eight to ten days.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 81, Vietnam Subject Files, Viet Operations in Laos and Cambodia, Vol. III. Top Secret; Specat; Exclusively Eyes Only. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² Attached but not printed is a retyped copy of Abrams' reply, message RUMUHTA 9301 to Moorer, February 14.

6. *The enemy supply situation and effect on enemy strategy.* Supply reserves south of Tchepone are limited. Occupation of Tchepone will disrupt the entire logistical structure. LOCs farther west are subject to interdiction.

7. *Effects of enemy anti-aircraft on U.S. helo operations.* Losses have been less than anticipated given the total number of sorties flown.

8. *Effects of weather.* Operations were slowed by bad weather for the first two days. Since then the weather has been good. Increasing cloudiness may have some effect on helo operations over the next few days.

General Abrams also notes:

—Primary objective remains to cut and disrupt the trail system. Exploitation of enemy caches is secondary.³

—The operation will continue as planned but at a slower pace than visualized because of the need for flank security. Our support is fully available for continued ARVN movement.

—The operation has gone well despite the delays caused by weather and bad road conditions. General Abrams believes that the operation will move west at the earliest possible time and is satisfied with the way it is going.

*Neither Secretary Rogers nor Secretary Laird is aware that we asked General Abrams for these views. It is important that we maintain the security of this exchange particularly as concerns Secretary Laird in order to protect General Abrams.*⁴

³ Nixon underlined most of this sentence and highlighted it in the margin.

⁴ Nixon highlighted this paragraph and wrote "OK" in the margin.

130. Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, February 16, 1971, noon.

SUBJECT

Military Operations in North Laos, South Laos, and Cambodia

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman	Defense
Henry A. Kissinger	Mr. David Packard
State	Mr. Dennis J. Doolin
Mr. U. Alexis Johnson	CIA
Mr. William H. Sullivan	Mr. Richard Helms
JCS	Mr. George Carver
Admiral Thomas H. Moorer	NSC
Lt. Gen. John W. Vogt	Mr. John H. Holdridge

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

The group discussed the Lam Son operation, noting that enemy resistance had not been heavy but that the ARVN was slow in moving on to the main roads of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Further hard fighting was anticipated. A move on Tchepone was projected within the next 3–5 days. Truck kills had been heavy. Operation Desert Rat, consisting of six battalions (4 in blocking positions and 2 in reverse), was operating against Rt. 23 in coordination with Lam Son 719. Good progress was being made in the Chhup Plantation operation.

In North Laos, the Long Tieng area was being hard-pressed, and Vang Pao had been shaken by the heavy rocket and mortar attack on his headquarters. 1800 Thai and Nam U reinforcements had been moved in, and good B–52 and tacair support was being provided; however, heavy fighting was anticipated over the next 6–8 weeks.

It was noted that guidance should be provided to posts abroad on the U.S. role in Laos, and that the question of a Tag Board reconnaissance mission over Communist China would be referred to the President.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Nodis. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. According to Kissinger's Record of Schedule, the meeting began at 12:07 p.m. ended at 1:06. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76)

131. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, February 18, 1971.

Kissinger: Because they couldn't get a large number of troops that far south, they're not—the North Vietnamese are not limited by troops, by manpower. They're limited by the, by the difficulty of access.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: And—and they—that problem is solved by putting the Chinese in there. If we went north, if we landed in Haiphong, or if we landed in Vinh or some place like that, then it's conceivable. But I don't think under present circumstances—they cannot.

Nixon: But the battle is shaping up on [unclear]?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Well, they're moving their divisions?

Kissinger: Oh, yeah. But they are practically committing their entire strategic reserve force—

Nixon: What does the intelligence say? Are they still confused? Are they [unclear]?

Kissinger: Now, they're pretty—

Nixon: What do the intercepts [unclear] when you were there?

Kissinger: No. Well, now, they're pretty sure of what it is, and they're moving in whenever they can.

Nixon: Our diversionary tactics aren't fooling them much now—?

Kissinger: Well, they're fool—still fooling them some. They're holding some, but they're not moving anyone from the coast. [unclear] But, again, they—

Nixon: The South Vietnamese tried this torpedo boat to attack ships?²

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 451-23. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. This exchange is part of a larger conversation, 6:16-6:37 p.m.

² On the evening of February 17, two South Vietnamese torpedo boats out of Danang, on interdiction patrol in the South China Sea opposite Quang Binh Province in southern North Vietnam, engaged and destroyed a North Vietnamese gunboat and a tanker. Later the South Vietnamese boats attacked two North Vietnamese junks, their crews armed, as it turned out, with machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, and recoilless rifles. The two sides exchanged fire for about an hour with inconclusive results and around midnight the South Vietnamese broke contact and returned to base. (Conboy and Andrade, *Spies and Commandos*, p. 248)

Kissinger: They tried one, and they're trying another one tonight. They did one; they're doing another one tonight.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: Now, some people scream that that's a violation of the understanding.³

Nixon: By the South Vietnamese?

Kissinger: Yeah, because they are technically part of the—but, I think you should just state that he—they violated the understanding on it they had with us.

[pause]

Nixon: Oh, I see. The point being that they're part of the understanding?

Kissinger: Yeah, but all attacks would stop on North Vietnam.

Nixon: What'll they do when you [unclear]?

Kissinger: We think that this—

Nixon: Um-hmm?

Kissinger: —they've actually claimed they sank eight ships last time. I don't know whether that's true. Well, they've got one more scheduled. It's probably already over today, and that's all that's authorized [unclear].

Nixon: Well, how do you feel your people will think? WSAG and the rest?⁴ Are they all reasonably staying [unclear]?

Kissinger: They're feeling fine.

Nixon: They're not—they're not getting jumpy? Do you know if Laird is a bit?

Kissinger: Well, Laird is a little bit jumpy, but I had breakfast with him this morning.

Nixon: He told me he was going to see you.

Kissinger: Yeah, I had breakfast with him, and he's all right.

Nixon: He's calmed down a little?

³ On October 29, 1968, President Johnson summarized the understanding:

“—Hanoi has agreed in a secret minute, and in our discussions to begin serious talks toward peace in Vietnam—talks which would include representatives of the Government of South Vietnam.

“—We have made it clear to them that a continuation of the bombing cessation was dependent, first, on respect for the DMZ, and second, upon there being no attacks on the [South Vietnamese] cities.” (*Foreign Relations*, 1964–1968, volume VII, Vietnam, September 1968–January 1969, Document 140)

⁴ The WSAG met earlier that day from 3:05 to 4:22 p.m., and discussion essentially was a situation report on Operation Lam Son 719 and the military campaign in Laos. Minutes of the meeting are in National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meeting Minutes, 1971.

Kissinger: Yes. Laird is a funny guy; he—he maneuvers like a maniac, but when the chips are really down, he’s amazing, and he’s also loyal to you—

Nixon: Depending on this.

Kissinger: So I—

Nixon: Well, he is. He’s a—

Kissinger: I rather like Mel.

Nixon: He’s a—he’s a rascal, but by golly, he’s our rascal—

Kissinger: That’s right.

Nixon: —and those kind of rascals [unclear]. I think, too, that on this thing, now, thank God, we’re not going to lose it. That’s all there is to it.

Kissinger: In Laos—

Nixon: We can’t. We can’t lose.

Kissinger: No, Mr. President—

Nixon: We—but, I can’t. I am thinking more in terms of Vietnam. For us, the objective of all these things is to get out of there and [unclear] it’s not going to be done. We can’t lose. We can lose an election, but we’re not going to lose this war, Henry. That’s my view. Do you agree with it?

Kissinger: I agree, Mr. President—

Nixon: I have a feeling about Laos as well.

Kissinger: That’s right.

Nixon: It isn’t a question of losing it, but we might. I mean, that’s it. This can make a hell of a difference. We—You say that the air is really pounding them pretty good?

Kissinger: I thought the weather has been off and on, but for the next three days, it’s expected to be perfect. It’s perfect now, and they’re pounding them. They’re putting every B-52 they’ve got in there. They’re putting [unclear]. They are pounding them around the clock.

Nixon: As far as on the ground, is there any way we can determine?

Kissinger: They’ve—they’ve set up special radars on the ground, things they can bomb within, I think, 150 yards of these—of the front-line troops. And—

Nixon: [unclear]—

Kissinger: —[unclear] the South Vietnamese.

Nixon: ‘Cause they’re lining up these B-52s?

Kissinger: Then, it’s going to be awfully tough for them to take this pounding. They—they took a direct pounding in Khe Sanh three years ago.

Nixon: Did they? And that turned out all right for us.

Kissinger: That worked out all right. We chewed up a lot of their troops. I've got a feeling, if things build up, I don't doubt that the press is going to try to, to cut us up. Now, the major work should be over. And they should stay out if they keep the roads cut. They already determined the Chup operation⁵ is going extremely well.

Nixon: It seems to me, everybody's agreed. That's what I understand.

Kissinger: Well, and Laos—we expected Laos to be much tougher. If they would roll over and play dead ten miles from their border, then they'd be completely through. On the other hand, all of the of the units they're going to lose up there [unclear] will not be ready for an offensive next year, or later this year.

Nixon: The main thing I'm interested in is just to be sure the South Vietnamese fight well—

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: —because they're going to be battling in there for years to come. I guess if they fight well, North Vietnam can never beat South Vietnam. Never. And it's because our South Vietnam has more people, and more—

Kissinger: And more equipment.

Nixon: What happens?

Kissinger: North Vietnam will be at the end of their supply lines. The geography will work against it. And in the meantime, in Cambodia, for example, what they have done in the Chup plantation area is to introduce Cambodian troops behind the Vietnamese troops, so that they're beginning to take over some of the territory. And—

Nixon: The Cambodians are not becoming hysterical over Lon Nol?

Kissinger: No, no. No. That's gone very smoothly. And also, it's interesting—of course, now, they don't report it any more—there haven't been any road cuts—roads cut since the Chup Plantation operation started.

Nixon: Did we draw them off?

Kissinger: Oh, yeah. We are occupying them all. They can't move around the country now.

Nixon: Did they fight in there? 300,000 that are in reserve, though, that's—Abrams believes is an adequate reserve for whatever North Vietnam—

⁵ South Vietnamese operation to neutralize enemy headquarters and base area in the Chup Plantation in Cambodia running parallel to Operation Lam Son 719 in Laos.

Kissinger: Yeah. I understand there's another division he's got in reserve, too. We've just got to stay cool now and, and shove in whatever reserves are needed. It's going to be tough, and we'll need strong will the next few weeks; there'll be panicky moments. But I think, having made strides, we ought to stay in there now through the rainy season—until the rainy season starts, and just chew them up.

Nixon: We've got to develop a position in terms of being able to stay as long as we're needed there.

Kissinger: And Moorer gave me some statistics today on helicopter losses, that, actually, they, they lost only six more helicopters last week than in a normal operating week for all of Southeast Asia, and less than they did in a comparable week last year. That, even with the Laos operation, and even with all these horror stories, they lost fewer helicopters last week than they did in the comparable period—

Nixon: I wonder if the—That's good. I wonder what the situation is with regard to fellows like goddamn [John W.] Gardner⁶ and [Edward M.] Kennedy⁷ going. Kennedy started—you know, they started to press buttons, and the—the Libs kind of all get together and go. But, this time, they aren't all going together [unclear].

Kissinger: What I'm beginning to think—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: —is that those who are, who are subject to Communist influence are all going nuts.

Nixon: Exactly.

Kissinger: And—

Nixon: I think Gardner is subject to Communist influence—

Kissinger: Yeah, I'm afraid so. And he's got this bastard, [Morton] Halperin,⁸ who used to be on my staff for three months. He was—He's become—

Nixon: He's got Halperin now?

Kissinger: Yeah, who's his chief aide, apparently—

Nixon: Gardner's?

Kissinger: Yes. But, at some moment, I'm going to surface some memos that Halperin wrote for me when he was trying to butter me up.

Nixon: Jesus! We still have Halperin. [unclear] Son-of-a-bitch. What's happened to him?

⁶ Former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, Chairman of the public interest advocacy group Common Cause, and anti-war activist.

⁷ Democratic Senator from Massachusetts.

⁸ Halperin joined Common Cause in February 1971 to advise on the organization's anti-war campaign; he was previously Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense in Johnson administration and briefly a member of the National Security Council Staff in 1969.

Kissinger: Well, I fired Halperin in July of '69—

Nixon: Muskie is the man with [Anthony] Lake?⁹

Kissinger: He's—

Nixon: I noticed Muskie is reorganizing his staff, because Lake is still [unclear].

Kissinger: I haven't seen him. Well, he's certainly not as sharp with policy research, which is what he said—he thought he was going to be. And, I don't think Lake is—

Nixon: He's not that gifted.

Kissinger: a) He isn't that heavy; b) His knowledge is out—very out of date. Halperin doesn't have any insight on this, anyway, because he was across the street writing think papers for me; he didn't even see any documents. In fact, as I said, I got rid of him in July '69. And—But, Halperin is probably very much on the list in influence.

Nixon: Yeah, I know. I—I heard that he is.

Kissinger: And, I think those are the guys—

Nixon: [unclear] over-conceited. [unclear]

Kissinger: And those are the guys that are going now.

Nixon: Like Gardner is? Who'd want that fool anyway?

Kissinger: Well, it's a tragedy. At one stage, I thought Gardner had pot—potential Presidential caliber.

Nixon: You ever hear Johnson's strategy? Gardner came in—I guess Johnson called him and Gardner came in—he said he just couldn't go with the emotional energy, you know, with Vietnam, and Johnson says, "Well, that's just fine. You can resign." He kicked him out. Just think. He shouldn't have done it. I mean, these guys [unclear]. If not, you kick 'em out. We can't just do it. One of these guys—

Kissinger: Yeah. But, you know, to say your policy is a policy that leads to more war—what is their alternative? If they had the guts to say, "Just get out," but that they don't have the guts to say. I may have to ask John Dutton for lunch some time because he's an old—he used to be an old friend—and just ask him, as a friend, "Now, what the hell would you do if you'd been in this whole thing?" It's a pity to see a man of his caliber go to hell.

Nixon: Henry [unclear] no hard feelings. You've got to see who finances [unclear]. It may be that. I—I've noticed that that's the fellow from Dreyfus, [Howard] Stein is financing it. Stein is way left, you know.

⁹ Anthony Lake was a member of Kissinger's staff until he resigned on April 29, 1970, partly because he differed with the administration over the decision to mount a cross-border operation into Cambodia. In 1971 he was a foreign policy adviser to Senator Edmund Muskie's Presidential campaign organization.

Kissinger: Yeah. Howard Stein—

Nixon: I think maybe he's just a pacifist. He's not to the left of these other financiers, who may be left, too.

Kissinger: Yes—

Nixon: Well, Stein is. Isn't it amazing? Here is Stein, one of the richest men in the country, and he is so goddamn liberal.

Kissinger: Well, but what you should see—Mr. President, you've changed the political landscape. I'm—

Nixon: I'm convinced of that.

Kissinger: I am absolutely convinced that you [unclear] Vietnam, as you are now 80 percent of the way to doing, no matter what happens—

Nixon: [unclear] if we get knocked out of Laos, they'll succeed on that—

Kissinger: Yeah, but we won't get knocked out of Laos. [unclear]—

Nixon: [unclear] The South Vietnamese are going to fight. They're going to stand and fight. Aren't they?

Kissinger: Oh, yeah. So far, they have. They are, right now, moving cautiously to reconnect, so that they can cover each other with artillery. That's fine. We don't care, as long as they've got the roads cut. And, the—But I think we can win in '72. These guys won't be able to stand 4 years in the wilderness. More, you can fight them off cheap.

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: I know, but I—

Nixon: I'll get a new establishment.

Kissinger: You can create your new establishment.

[Omitted here is discussion of Italian Premier Emilio Colombo and the President's schedule.]

Kissinger: Agnew would like to go to Asia again to visit some of our friends.

Nixon: Yeah. This is a question of honor, isn't it?

Kissinger: I think it's not. I think we don't need any additional covenants on paper, now.

Nixon: I don't think it's the time. I think we should do it if we get anything in Laos.

Kissinger: That's what I think. It would just—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: Well, I just wanted to—

Nixon: We have been a little tentative, Henry, considering [unclear]—

Kissinger: [unclear]

Nixon: You know what that is—you know what I mean? That's—That's—

Kissinger: Well, it's partly human. He likes to be in places where he gets a nice human reception.

Nixon: Yes, of course, Henry. He's [unclear] very sensitive [unclear] he gets hell of a good reception. But, I must say, you know, after seeing Hubert [Humphrey] today with all his good qualities, can you really imagine Hubert—

Kissinger: No way—

Nixon: —being, being here?

Kissinger: Mr. President, I, I told [John] Chancellor this. I said, "I love Hubert." And, I said, "But, can you really feel that if there was a Democrat here, this country wouldn't be torn to pieces?" He asked me what your—I said, "The—the thing you never get credit for is you've kept the Right in this country related to this, to the government, where, in all normal situations, if anyone else had had to do this difficult thing, and—so, you'll still turn out to be the best protection of the students who are rioting against you, even though they'll never thank you for it, because the alternative to you in 1968 was not a liberal Democrat, but a [George C.] Wallace or a [Ronald] Reagan. And, I think that if this country is radicalized, it will not be from the Left. The Left will start it, but the Right will take it over.

Nixon: Yeah, maybe. But, right now, the important thing is to see this miserable thing through. They [unclear] the North Vietnamese [unclear] settle the thing. In fact, there it is. And, I suppose it's a long shot, it may just be the Chinese Government saying it.

Kissinger: No, that's against their national—
[unclear exchange]

Kissinger: I mean, Duc called them their "hereditary enemy." What I think we can do, what I would recommend, Mr. President, in our game plan is if we get through this [unclear] bomb September, close to the election, I ask for a meeting with Le Duc Tho. Then have it October 15th, and tell him, "Look, we're willing to give you a fixed deadline of total withdrawal next year for the release of all prisoners and a ceasefire." What we can then tell the South Vietnamese, "You've had a year without war to build up." And, I think, then, we can settle. We may have a fifty-fifty chance to get it.

Nixon: We should be able to get it. What the hell is their choice? [unclear]

Kissinger: I think they may take it. But it's too early, because it would panic the South Vietnamese. But, after Thieu's election, I think we may be able to do that.

Nixon: Okay.

132. Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon¹

Washington, February 22, 1971.

SUBJECT

Operations Against North Vietnam

Two types of operations during the past few days have resulted in ordnance being expended against North Vietnamese targets.² An outline of the operation is as follows:

1. *Air Strikes*

- Conducted by US aircraft, against NVN air defenses threatening US air operations over Laos.
- Separate strikes on 20 February and 21 February. (Strike scheduled for 22 February diverted due to bad weather over North Vietnam.)
- 24 aircraft in first strike and 32 aircraft in second strike.
- First strike was in Mu Gia pass area (approx. 6 mi north in Route 15 area). Second strike was in 25 miles west-southwest of Dong Hoi, as well as in general area of first strike near Mu Gia pass.
- Preliminary results indicate a composite result of 4 SAMs destroyed, 4 transporters destroyed, 2 SAMs damaged, 10 prime movers/trucks destroyed, 35 fires, and 43 secondary explosions. All US aircraft returned safely.

2. *Maritime Operations*

- Conducted by South Vietnamese against NVN coastal maritime activities.
- Activity was on 19–20 February.
- 4 Patrol Torpedo Fast (PTF) boats used.
- General area of operations was off the coast of Vinh, off the coast of Dong Hoi, and in the coastal waters between those two locations.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 153, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, 11 Feb 1971–28 March 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Kissinger forwarded the memorandum to Nixon under a covering memorandum, February 22. A stamped notation on Laird's memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² In a memorandum for the record, March 1, reporting on a meeting among Laird, Kissinger, Haig, and Pursley on February 18, the Secretary of Defense informed Kissinger about the operations and noted that Rogers strongly opposed the operations because he believed they violated the bombing halt understanding. (Ibid., Box 1026, Haig Special File, Memcons, Presidential/HAK Jan–April 1971)

- Preliminary results reported by the South Vietnamese indicate (a) 1 steel hulled cargo ship sunk, (b) enemy escort craft sunk, (c) 2 enemy escort craft heavily damaged, and (d) 1 enemy patrol craft heavily damaged. The South Vietnamese had 1 gunner killed and 1 PTF damaged.

I felt you might be interested in the results of the recent operations involving expenditure of ordnance against North Vietnam. I shall keep you informed of any other operations of significance.

Melvin R. Laird

133. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, February 22, 1971, 7:15–8:25 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Kissinger
Ambassador Dobrynin

I asked Dobrynin to call on me at the White House in order to get the conversation started. I behaved in a deliberately aloof but correct manner.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

Vietnam

Dobrynin finally turned to a message he had from Hanoi. He said he had transmitted my comments of January 9² to Hanoi in the form of thinking out loud but not as an official position. Hanoi had made the following reply:

1.—To judge whether there was any possibility of making an agreement separately on military questions, they would have to know what date of withdrawal we were thinking of.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 490, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1971, Vol. 4 [Part 2]. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. The meeting was held in the Map Room at the White House. The time of the meeting is taken from Kissinger's Record of Schedule. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76) Kissinger forwarded the memorandum of conversation to Nixon under a covering memorandum, February 27. The full text is in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIII, Soviet Union, October 1970–October 1971, Document 121.

² See Document 101.

2.—Our recent actions in Indochina made them question whether we were interested in a political solution and whether we still did not seek a military solution.

3.—They were prepared to resume conversations with me in Paris.

[I had told Dobrynin on January 9 that at some point, if Hanoi were willing to separate military from political issues, we might be prepared to set a target date for our withdrawal, provided there was a ceasefire that lasted through 1972 at least and provided that there were serious talks. In that connection, I had told Dobrynin that I was astonished that in my talks with the North Vietnamese they had treated me like any other American negotiator and had given me exactly the same speeches that they had given other American negotiators.]³

Dobrynin offered to transmit any reply that I might care to make to Hanoi, which is the first time to my knowledge that the Soviet Union has made such an offer. I told him we would have to think about his proposition and I would have to report it in detail to the President.⁴

³ Brackets in the original.

⁴ According to a memorandum of conversation prepared by Kissinger of a March 5 meeting with the Soviet Ambassador, Dobrynin asked Kissinger for his response to Hanoi's message, and Kissinger replied that he would be available to meet if they had something specific to discuss. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 490, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1971, Vol. 4 [Part 2]) It is printed in full in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIII, Soviet Union, October 1970–October 1971, Document 133.

134. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)¹

Washington, February 22, 1971.

1945—Telecon With PRESUS—22 February 1971—Incoming

One minute for the President, sir.

PRESUS: Hello. *Ans*: Yes sir, Mr. President.

PRESUS: I just wanted to get your own evaluation of how the situation is going. *Ans*: As we expected we had that trouble with the one battalion, but I have talked with Gen Abrams two or three times. Con-

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Moorer Diary, July 1970–July 1974. No classification marking.

sequently I feel and, as you know, the plan is now to jump off into Tchepone in the next two or three days, with two brigades of the Airborne Battalion and I think, Mr. President, we just have to stay with this thing. I think it is going to come out all right. It is true that the movement has been slow but they are in the process of establishing their firm logistics and fire support bases. And, as you know, we feel that at least two battalions of the 102d NVN regiment were rendered ineffective as a result of this action over the weekend and, subsequent to that time, they have laid on a large-scale air and artillery attack in this area. I have asked for pictures of the enemy and weapons, etc., that they reported if they possibly can. It is a tough one. Routes 9 and 914 have been cut and we have now about 1200 more guerrilla up at Highway 23 watching to see how the situation develops. From intercepts we know that the enemy is reorienting his entire structure in that direction but have not, as yet, seen any movement but probably will in a day or so. I think when they get into the Tchepone area things will start to really move. As you know, they are going down the high ground between Highway 9 and Highway 914 en route to Tchepone and two brigades are scheduled to be airlifted in there. We are expecting a lot of fighting and the enemy certainly is putting his major attention to this particular operation because they realize how critical this is.

PRESUS: First of all, we expected them to fight and, secondly, we aren't going to win all of the battles—we are going to win some and lose some. *Ans:* Yes, sir. The FSB are digging in and, as you noted on the map, that particular one was the most exposed because it was right up there in the path of all the reinforcements coming down from NVN and it was a helluva fight and they laid on a lot of fire power and I think they got the results they wanted. So far as the overall exchange between the NVN and the SVN I believe it is highly favorable so far as the SVN are concerned.

PRESUS: I see in *The Star* tonight where it states to the effect that 1,000 SVN are now surrounded. That certainly is a surprise. I saw nothing in any of the reports of our own on this. *Ans:* I don't know what they could possibly be thinking of. As you know the 39th Battalion joined the 21st just slightly to the southwest but we don't have any reports of that kind.

PRESUS: How is the morale of the SVN? *Ans:* Good. From time to time you are going to hear reports such as from our friend, Tuckman, who reported incorrectly that we had Americans dressed in SVN uniforms—he is going to be on the air tonight on ABC with some interview with a SVN—the press will make a lot of that.

PRESUS: The main thing is how it really comes out in the end. This day-to-day stuff doesn't matter much—it's the end result which counts the most. *Ans:* I have asked Gen Abrams to submit right away

and then, as a matter of course, every Friday his personal evaluation and conceptual plan for the following week. In addition, Mel Laird has also sent him a message requesting that he hold either “backgrounders” or other reporting which is generated from the Saigon area.

PRESUS: Yes, we want positive statements from there but they have to be true. *Ans:* You don’t have to worry about that, Mr. President, Gen Abrams is a hard man to get to talk.

PRESUS: On the other hand we don’t want the press to be reporting every little skirmish as losing the war either and we’ll have that great humming bee going back here. We want to keep the war in the proper perspective. The main thing I am concerned about is the SVN. I don’t want them to lose confidence in themselves—I don’t want them to suffer defeat and hope that that can stay in there another month. *Ans:* I think they can stay longer than that.

PRESUS: What was the result of that? *Ans:* They discussed the current situation and the SVN were very firm in their determination. They were not discouraged—they recognize they are going to have more casualties and they are willing to take them. Not long ago, about Christmas, they stated they were willing to lose over 1,000 in this effort but, of course, they haven’t lost nearly that much as yet.

PRESUS: Another thing, these people are capable of putting one or two more corps in couldn’t they? *Ans:* Yes. You may have noted they anticipate some rather heavy fighting below in MR-1 after we leave in June. This certainly will have significant effects on the NVN.

PRESUS: I would hope in Laird’s briefing you would emphasize to him that this was planned with a big military advance in MR-1 and that in this case it has prevented the killing of a lot of Americans and that, due to the SVN courage and valor the SVN have now cut off supplies, etc. *Ans:* I think we are doing real well with our interdiction efforts by air and we are going to see some movement of trucks south of Highway 9 by a large shuttle effort to take them out of Base Area 611.

PRESUS: What was this Air Force guy’s idea in saying that the amount of traffic in the trail had doubled since this started? *Ans:* The point is, Mr. President, it is erroneous and, in fact the roads are cut two or three times by the SVN—between Highway 92 and 914 and Highway 9. So I don’t know where he got that information from. We do make up a weekly report on the results as we estimate them in terms of input and throughput. But this report is usually lagging the real world by about ten days. I don’t know where he was picking up his information from but I am trying to find out right now.

PRESUS: Why in the hell is he talking to the press? *Ans:* I just don’t know, sir . . .

PRESUS: I can’t understand it either. The talking should be coming from Abrams or Weyand. *Ans:* Yes, sir, these other people shouldn’t be

talking at all. But, what happens, as you know, some of these reporters drift into the Ready Rooms or something like that and begin to ask leading questions and more or less write the story and ask the questions later. These young people just don't have a feel for the consequences.

PRESUS: The main thing here is to win and it simply means having the SVN suffer a bit but not at the risk of defeat. They have already done a lot and they must continue to take whatever casualties that they have to in order to hold their ground and stay in there because that is all we need. *Ans:* They have 10,000 men yet in reserve plus the Marine Brigade so they will be put in there. Gen Abrams reports that Gen Lam is confident in MR-1 that he can handle the situation although there will be, as I said, heavy fighting. Their morale is good. I have been over there two or three times and their enthusiasm and drive is superb but on the other hand, you get a young pilot in there who has only been there a short time and he makes all these statements and being quoted as saying that this is the worse part of the war he has ever been in and the papers pick that up as being five years, you see. Actually, I think the operations are going exactly as we expected them to.

PRESUS: And we've inflicted a helluva lot of damage on them. *Ans:* Yes, sir we have killed about the equivalent of three battalions.

PRESUS: The way I look at it is similar to Grant and the Wilderness. Grant lost twice as much as Lee lost in battles but he won the war. These people are in in the war in SVN and they can't lose. *Ans:* Of course, we have this operation down in the Chup Plantation area.

PRESUS: I understand there is going to be a big battle? *Ans:* Yes sir and Gen Tri is ready to meet it with his forces. We have an airlift into Cholon (?) coming up Highway 5 north of the enemy which is located between Highway 75 and Highway 7.

PRESUS: Is there a chance of putting it through? Yes

PRESUS: A chance he might win the skirmish? Yes, the NVN will react to his presence along the routes there and, as you may know, some of these units have been there since last May just sitting there and waiting for the supplies to come down and we have every indication that Tri will be in for a big fight.

PRESUS: Can Tri handle it? Yes, sir.

PRESUS: Will they get closer to the supplies? Yes, sir, he has got 17,000 men over there near the highways.

PRESUS: Okay, Admiral, just be sure that when you talk to Abrams you let him know that I am not concerned about the day-by-day problems. He must not be too worried about that. But we do have to tackle the public relations people over there and here and if things don't come out all right in the end we'll back him all the way and continue to ham-

mer them using everything we can to ensure it isn't lost. *Ans*: I know that it is real tough on you, too, sir.

PRESUS: Oh, I'm not worried about that. They will lose other battles but the main thing is to win in the end. *Ans*: This is right and that is just what we are doing.

PRESUS: Fine, Admiral.

135. Memorandum for the 40 Committee¹

Washington, February 22, 1971.

SUBJECT

The Provincial Reconnaissance Unit Program in Vietnam

1. Summary

CIA has supported the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) program in Vietnam since its inception in 1964.² The Government of Vietnam (GVN) had been expected to assume full financial and logistical support for the PRU program at the end of FY 1971. The GVN, however, asserts that it is unable to assume the full costs of the PRU in FY 1972. It is therefore proposed to continue partial funding of the PRU at the reduced level of [*dollar amount not declassified*] in FY 1972 to ensure the existence during a politically important period of a force which is both unique and effective in countering the communist political apparatus. This partial support would permit the GVN to accomplish an orderly absorption of the PRU into the National Police Field Force (NPFF). This proposal has the approval of Ambassador Samuel Berger, acting on behalf of Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, and of Ambassador Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs.³

[Omitted here is the body of the memorandum.]

¹ Source: Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, 40 Committee Meetings. Secret; Eyes Only.

² For information on the PRU program, see *Foreign Relations, 1964–1968*, volume VI, Vietnam, January–August 1968, Document 143.

³ In an undated memorandum to Kissinger, Holdridge endorsed the proposal and added: "Again, however, we suggest that you emphasize that concrete steps be taken this year to prepare for a U.S. phase-out at the end of FY 1972. The GVN should be made to understand that this is the last year the PRU program will receive U.S. support." (National Security Council, Nixon Intelligence Files, Subject Files, Vietnam 14 Jan 1971–22 Dec 1971) According to a memorandum for the record, October 22, by Jessup, the 40 Committee approved continued support for a 3,500-force level and [*dollar amount not declassified*] in assistance for FY 1972 during a March 10 meeting. (Ibid.)

136. Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, February 23, 1971, 2:20 p.m.–3:10 p.m.

SUBJECT

Laos

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

Under Secretary John N. Irwin

Ambassador William Sullivan

Mr. Robert J. McCloskey

Defense

Mr. David Packard

Mr. Daniel Henkin

CIA

Mr. Richard Helms

Mr. George Carver

JCS

Adm. Thomas H. Moorer

Lt. Gen. John W. Vogt

White House

Mr. Ronald L. Ziegler²

NSC Staff

B/Gen. Alexander M. Haig

Col. Richard T. Kennedy

Mr. John H. Holdridge

Mr. D. Keith Guthrie

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

With regard to press policy on the military operations in southern Laos, the WSAG:

(1) Reaffirmed the responsibility of the Press Secretary to the President to coordinate on a daily basis press guidance for USG agencies in Washington.

(2) Agreed that United States and South Vietnamese Government representatives in Vietnam should play a larger role in providing information on the southern Laos operations to the press and that USG spokesmen in Washington should as a general rule avoid dealing with day-to-day operational matters.

(3) Agreed that greater emphasis should be given in press briefings and statements to explaining the overall concepts and objectives of the operations in southern Laos.

(4) Endorsed a Defense Department instruction calling for General Abrams and General Weyand to schedule an early press briefing to explain the objectives of the southern Laos operations and their con-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Nodis. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House.

² Not present at the beginning of the meeting. [Footnote in the original.]

tribution to the safety of US troops and the continuation of US troop withdrawals.

(5) Endorsed facilitation of travel of US correspondents to the area of operations in southern Laos on a carefully planned basis.

(6) Decided to continue the ban on backgrounding on the southern Laos operations by State and Defense Department officials in Washington.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

137. **Diary Entry by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)**¹

Washington, February 25, 1971.

1200

Met with Dr. Kissinger in his White House office in preparation for briefing of the President on the Lamson 719 operation.² I took this occasion to comment upon General Westmoreland's reservations concerning the Lamson 719 operation. I pointed out to Henry the following:

a. General Westmoreland was briefed by the COMUSMACV briefers, along with the rest of the Chiefs, when this operation was being planned and he stated no objections at that time.

b. General Westmoreland was polled by SecDef prior to concurrence in the execution of the operation and agreed, at that time, to its being executed.

c. During the entire planning process for this operation, General Westmoreland said nothing about the weaknesses of the ARVN airborne troops, the weakness of their commander, or their propensity for "dying easily".

Kissinger replied that I should not worry about this because he had not told the President about Westmoreland's briefing.

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Moorer Diary, July 1970–July 1974. Top Secret.

² At 11 a.m., Moorer spoke on the telephone with Laird. According to Moorer's diary entry, "Kissinger told him [Laird] that after the President had talked to Laird yesterday he had a little better conceptual understanding of what is going on in Lamson 719 and Henry thought that if I could give the President a once a week conceptual briefing on the operations rather than on specifics such as the number of helicopter sorties and helicopter losses, etc., that the President would be more interested and follow the action better. I replied that I could arrange this." (Ibid.)

I then explained to Kissinger that the message from Abrams that Kissinger described as “petulant” was merely Abrams’ faithfully describing Thieu’s conversation with him and that Abrams’ concurrence in Thieu’s plan was not implicit in the “petulant” message. I then showed him Abrams 251200Z in which Abrams described the results of his examination of Thieu’s scheme of maneuver and the modifications resulting from that examination.

Then proceeded to the President’s Executive Office Building office and briefed him on the Lamson 719 operation.³ The President was pleased and encouraged by the prospects of 6,000 additional RVNAF troops being committed to the operation and seemed pleased with the entire ARVN plan as described in Abrams 251200Z (copy attached).⁴

I informed the President of the situation at Fire Support Base 31, reported under tank/artillery attack. The President said that he had not heard of this and I went on to give him the detailed information derived from our telephone call to the COMUSMACV DDO.

I then briefed him on the recent truck activity along key infiltration routes and the sensor indications over the past several days. I briefed him on the enemy buildup in the Tchepone area and the North Vietnamese forces remaining in North Vietnam.

I then gave him a conceptual summary of ARVN plans for the next several weeks and made the point that this should be considered an *area* and that Tchepone as a *point* had really little, if any, significance.

³ A memorandum for the President’s file provides a record of the conversation among Nixon, Moorer, and Kissinger, which took place in the Oval Office from 12:05 to 1:09 p.m. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President’s Office Files, Box 84, Memoranda for the President, Beginning February 21, 1971)

⁴ Not attached.

138. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, February 26, 1971, 10:40–11:45 a.m.

PARTICIPANTS

President Nixon
 Vice President Agnew
 Secretary of State William P. Rogers
 Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird
 Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms
 Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer
 Under Secretary of State John N. Irwin II
 Assistant to the President Henry A. Kissinger
 Ambassador George Bush, US Representative to the UN
 Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs U. Alexis Johnson
 Director, U.S. Information Agency, Frank Shakespeare
 General Alexander M. Haig, Deputy Assistant to the President for National
 Security Affairs
 John H. Holdridge, NSC Staff
 Colonel Richard Kennedy, NSC Staff

President Nixon: Our purpose here is to see where we are. I'll ask Helms and Moorer to brief on Laos, and then I'll ask Rogers and Sisco to brief on the Middle East.

[Director Helms briefed on the military situation in Laos.]²

President Nixon: What kind of numbers are we talking about in South Laos? We should keep this in mind. The North Vietnamese are attacking in north Laos. If they should attack and succeed, then the question will be asked: why didn't they go up north?

Director Helms: All the Meos are in the north—none are in the south, they also have some Thais and others in the north. We'll sit down to see if we can move some units from the south to the north. Those in the south are from that area.

President Nixon: Will a loss in the north be worth holding the western part in the south? We should consider this.

Director Helms: We will do that early in the week in the WSAG.
 [Director Helms resumed his briefing.]

President Nixon: Do we have advisors in the south?

Director Helms: No, they are at Pakse.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-110, Minutes of Meetings, NSC Minutes, Originals 1971. Secret. The meeting took place in the Cabinet Room of the White House. All brackets are in the original. A handwritten notation at the top of the first page reads, "NSC Meeting: Laos."

² Helms' briefing paper is attached but not printed.

President Nixon: The purpose of holding them out is purely political.

Director Helms: Yes. No one wants these to get captured.

[Director Helms resumed his briefing.]

President Nixon: What were the pictures in the paper this morning?

Director Helms: That was in the Panhandle.

[Director Helms resumed his briefing.]

President Nixon: The purpose of this meeting is to be sure that everyone has the background. How long has the Chinese road building been going on?

Director Helms: Two or three years.

President Nixon: There is no connection with what else is going on in Laos; the same is true of west Laos, where the North Vietnamese operate and the South.

Mr. Johnson: I agree.

Mr. Irwin: As a general proposition it's a see-saw action in north Laos which has been going on since 1960.

Secretary Laird: It goes on each year.

President Nixon: The North Vietnamese are fighting on 4 fronts. How do they have so much punch in the north? Is there no attrition?

Director Helms: Since they have 2 divisions, they usually refurbish in the rainy season.

President Nixon: Could they take Laos anytime? Why don't they?

Director Helms: Yes, they could.

Mr. Johnson: They are always concerned what is the reaction going to be to a move to Mekong.

President Nixon: We don't want to get trapped into thinking that it's all a reaction to the south Laos operation.

Secretary Rogers: They would have big new problems if they take over the Lao government.

President Nixon: A takeover would be a blatant issue.

Director Helms: The next deal may be worse than what the North Vietnamese have now.

Mr. Irwin: The Russians may be restraining them.

Mr. Johnson: They have nothing to gain from taking over the government.

[Director Helms resumed and concluded his briefing.]

President Nixon: What about the traffic on the Ho Chi Minh Trail? The news says there is a sharp disagreement between DIA and CIA on the amount of traffic moving. Is there disagreement?

Director Helms: No, we work together on this.

Secretary Rogers: They put more into Tchepone but less is moving south.

Secretary Laird: DIA puts the supplies higher up than CIA does.

Secretary Rogers: But they say it's not getting south of Tchepone.

President Nixon: What can I do to get the press straight?

Dr. Kissinger: I share Bill Rogers' analysis. They want to have supplies south. The more traffic in the shuttle that isn't getting south, the less traffic there is in the south.

Mr. Irwin: That showed up yesterday.

Director Helms: There is no disagreement on facts.

President Nixon: I just wanted to be sure whether there was a disagreement.

Secretary Laird: There's always a judgment factor.

Secretary Rogers: The Russians have now condemned the operation but were restrained.³ The Russians have finally concluded that the Chinese are now not going in.

Dr. Kissinger: The Russians used the same phraseology as the Chinese.

Secretary Rogers: They pointed out to Souvanna that the Chinese are keeping out because the Russians charge the Chinese with responsibility.

Director Helms: They still don't know whether Thieu will go into North Vietnam. Their propaganda will rise for this.

President Nixon: There's a resolution by Mondale⁴ making my statement specific that it's limited to protection of our forces. That would give them a free ride. Mondale didn't get Symington and many others to go with him.

Secretary Laird: They are whipsawing both ways. Some say the date is not soon enough; others say it's too short.

President Nixon: The caucus was for January 1, 1973, and the others were for January 1, 1972. They are confused on what line to take. They all want to have a political line on what we do. The opponents

³ During a meeting with Kissinger on February 26, Dobrynin handed him a note from the Soviet leadership that protested U.S. support of the South Vietnamese operation in Laos. One phrase of particular concern to Kissinger was "members of the Socialist community would not remain indifferent onlookers in case of new aggressive action by the United States against the DRV." See *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIII, Soviet Union, October 1970–October 1971, Document 128.

⁴ On February 25, Senator Walter Mondale (D-MN) proposed a resolution prohibiting U.S. forces from supporting a South Vietnamese ground attack into North Vietnam without prior and explicit approval from Congress.

take different lines—there's the '73 group and the '72 group, and the get-out-now line. There's the Jackson line (keep on until the POWs are free) and the why-are-we-there-at-all group.

Secretary Rogers: I'm concerned about the Thieu statement that he'll try to keep the restrictions to keep us out.

President Nixon: We already said we won't support him then. When will the South Vietnamese have to get out of Laos? We can decide to use dilatory action on the resolutions.

Admiral Moorer: We have to get out about 1 May because of the weather. The North Vietnamese take out their forces in the rainy season, though there may be some minor political action.

Secretary Rogers: Will there be a time when there is no combat activity in the area and we won't have to keep so many sorties going in?

Admiral Moorer: Yes.

Secretary Rogers: We'll hold Congress until then. We can fight them off.

Secretary Laird: They will use the Selective Service Act extension to put limitations on. We can defeat it by saying it's not the place for those amendments. We can't keep them bottled up.

Secretary Rogers: We'll have trouble on the North Vietnam one.

Vice President Agnew: There's talk of holding it to fixed-wing aircraft.

Secretary Rogers: We told them we can't do that.

[Mr. Ziegler comes in at 11:20 a.m.]

President Nixon: Tom [Moorer], could you brief us?

Admiral Moorer: There are operations going on in the Chu Minh forest, in the Parrot's Beak area, and on the Mekong to secure the convoys. There's Operation Commando Hunt at the intersection of the key highways coming out of the passes, which began in October. In January we also added concentrations and moving trucks and personnel. We have naval forces off the coast for deception, complementing the Lamson operation. The Chup Plantation operations involve 17,000 South Vietnamese and three enemy divisions.

Now to come to Lamson 719. Originally it involved 10,000 South Vietnamese and the enemy were estimated to total 14,000. The enemy now total 28,000. The ARVN are going to reinforce; they're moving Marines into action and will bring a Marine brigade up from the South. Also they will move additional units from the east of MR-I to the west. Abe Abrams now says that while the leadership of the ARVN Airborne needs improvement, the losses suffered by the North Vietnamese have been heavier than those suffered by the ARVN in recent fights. The 1st ARVN Division is good; its leadership is good and aggressive.

The logistics picture is as follows: On balance I feel we have significantly affected their ability to move supplies south. We still have tough fighting ahead. We can't estimate fully the results of air attacks.

Secretary Rogers: Do we have pictures? From gunships, etc.? We should get them out to the press.

Admiral Moorer: South of the 19th parallel the enemy has 8,000 men along the DMZ, and they could bring 8,000 more down to the operation area. There are 20,000 in the operation; this total could be 44,000. They deem this so important that they are bringing forces in. Their losses put a great burden on the enemy. But we'll have tough fighting ahead.

Secretary Rogers: Can we keep our men off TV immediately after the battle?

Secretary Laird: The problem is newsmen at the base camp areas. There are so many of them that that's a problem, too. It's hard to keep them busy.

President Nixon: The problem is exaggeration. The press corps loads their statements. The reporters are young and literate and they don't win prizes for saying that all is well. Now the situation is whether the South Vietnamese should take more reporters with them.

Secretary Laird: The reporters don't want to go with them.

President Nixon: The situation now is that the press and the editors are against the war, so they will report this way. We have to keep a sense of perspective and have patience that this will pass. The prime question is whether the operation will work. All of us must realize we face a tough period ahead. How is the ARVN fighting? I gather they are fighting well and have the staying power needed for the weeks that are needed. We can't win against the press but we have to try and use our big guns—Bill and Mel and Abrams are briefing and that is good. We have to remember that it's rough and will continue to be. But the real point is whether the operation militarily will work.

Secretary Laird: We have to watch for an attack from North Vietnam against our forces at Khe Sanh.

Secretary Rogers: Can't we get the leaders of our forces on the ground to cut off the statements on an individual basis?

Vice President Agnew: That might make a bigger story.

Secretary Rogers: Not if it's voluntarily done.

Secretary Laird: We are trying to get the story across in the right way—but they don't want favorable stories.

President Nixon: We have to try it but we have to recognize we are fighting a tough problem. We can't keep the stories from coming. The best thing is to give the press something to do.

[The meeting then turned to a discussion of the Middle East.]

139. Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, February 26, 1971, 3:49–4:32 p.m.

SUBJECT

Laos

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

Mr. U. Alexis Johnson

Amb. William Sullivan

Defense

Mr. David Packard

Rear Adm. William R. Flanagan

CIA

Mr. Richard Helms

Mr. William Nelson

JCS

Lt. Gen. John W. Vogt

NSC Staff

Col. Richard T. Kennedy

Mr. John H. Holdridge

Mr. D. Keith Guthrie

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. *Lao SGUs*. The WSAG endorsed the plan submitted by the field calling for diversion of four Lao SGUs from Operation Oklahoma City to the southern edge of the Plaine des Jarres north of Ban Na.

2. *Thai SGUs*. The WSAG requested immediate assessments of:

(a) the comparative military advantages of employment of Thai SGUs or Thai regular troops in the defense of Long Tieng.

(b) the legal issues involved in the use of Thai regular troops at Long Tieng.

(c) the relative advantages of the two alternative plans proposed by the field for utilization of Thai SGUs to defend Long Tieng. This assessment should be based on appropriate consultation with the field and with the Thai Government.

3. *Air Support*. The WSAG directed preparation of a survey of available Thai and US assets for air support of friendly troops in North Laos.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Nodis. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House.

140. Conversation Among President Nixon, Secretary of State Rogers, Secretary of Defense Laird, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)¹

Washington, February 27, 1971.

Nixon: All right, so what the main, main point is: what about all the hills we lost yesterday, and what's the situation? Is it—at any rate are we ready to bug out, and so forth and so on, or not? I think I know the answers, but quickly tell us what has happened overnight, since—in the last 24 hours? Is it up, down, or sideways?

Moorer: All right, sir. First, this week we had this operation [Operation Toan Thang 01/71] down in the south in Cambodia and, as you know, there was very heavy fighting right there at [unclear] where over 200 of the enemy were killed—

Nixon: Good.

Moorer: —very light casualties on part of the South Vietnamese. The operations are continuing on schedule. As you know, sir, this operation will go 'til 1 July, and then making a—

Nixon: Yeah.

Moorer: —deliberate, thorough—

Nixon: Yeah. Tom [Moorer], with regard to that operation, is it—could it be fairly safe to be said at the present time the death of Tri² has not, to an appreciable extent, reduced the effectiveness—the verve of the operation [Lam Son 719]?

Moorer: Oh, that's right. That's quite true.

Nixon: In other words, they were able to change commands.

Moorer: We had the one report—

Nixon: This is not unimportant—

Moorer: —that the—

Nixon: In one, they thought it was Tri, only it didn't—

Moorer: Yes, sir. We, we had one report that the—of course, the—that some of the senior commanders actually were—

Nixon: Yeah?

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 459–2. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. The transcript is part of a larger conversation, 9:18–11:57 a.m.

² Lieutenant General Do Cao Tri, in charge of the Chup Plantation operation inside Cambodia, died in a helicopter crash on February 23.

Moorer: —upset about his—

Nixon: [unclear]

Moorer: —actions. On the other hand, what they want is contact, they say, and then they are [unclear] go right back to—

Nixon: Yeah.

Moorer: —the very top [unclear].

Nixon: You've already answered this question. That's—

Moorer: I think the answer to that's no, sir—

Nixon: [unclear] agree on the answer to this question. You know, we all know from, from the historical thing. Everybody, everybody—I'll ask it—almost everybody agrees that [unclear] had Stonewall Jackson been at Gettysburg, the South might have won the war. So, the general does make a difference.

Rogers: That's right.

Laird: It would have made a difference—

Moorer: Mr. President—

Nixon: Huh?

Laird: It would have made a hell of a difference there.

Nixon: Because Stonewall Jackson would have, instead of marching those poor bastards across that [unclear].

[laughter]

Nixon: He'd have gone around and taken them from the rear. Go ahead.

Moorer: Yes, well, now I wanted to describe to you, I guess, a pretty significant thing we got over the evening. One is, as I told you when I briefed you on this plan, I think we left a—the idea for the 1st Regiment of the 1st Division to move prior on this highway here, 914, and for the 3rd Regiment to come across here. They are grouping these battalions now into—so that they'll have their whole organization intact, of the—with the—this is what these movement flags mean as they move the 1st and the 3rd Regiments up into position. They're moving there, as you know, they already—then there are reporters travelling this road, though, operating along this road, and there's nary a bomb-free area from here, down to here. We're not bombing in there because the ARVN is patrolling that road. Next, up here, where there's been quite a bit of COMINT about Fire Support Base 31A. It was an area called Hill 31.³ And there's some very heavy fighting in this area.

³ The regiments mentioned by Moorer were part of the South Vietnamese Lam Son 719 force. The Hill 31 fight took place north of the axis of advance, Route 9, of the South Vietnamese into Laos. For a discussion of the battle, see *Lam Son 719*, by Major General Nguyen Duy Hinh (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1979), pp. 81–88.

Nixon: Well, the score last night: they had lost 450 South Vietnamese killed?⁴

Laird: No, sir, that's not correct.

Moorer: That's not right. We don't have reports. This battle is still going on, and they report as follows: that the South Vietnamese are, are dug in 200 meters from their previous position, and that the North Vietnamese have taken a part of the hill; that they are still fighting. [unclear] the fact is reported that 250 North Vietnamese dead, 100 along—right on the base, I think in the center of the base, and another 150 or so in the vicinity. Two kilometers to the east, they reported another 200 dead. And I think the radio this morning was talking about very large numbers of North Vietnamese casualties. That's the first time that I've heard anything at that—in that direction. But, there's been a, a series of attacks—tank fights. They've—

Nixon: What about Laird's [unclear]?

Moorer: They reported 10 tanks destroyed: one by artillery and nine by Tactical Air. And then, there was a tank fight by—between the ARVN tanks and the North Vietnamese tanks along this Road 92, just at dusk—which would be just a day like this morning—where there were three North Vietnamese tanks destroyed and one South Vietnamese tank destroyed. So, the issue is a stalemate down there, but I think the significant thing is that the South Vietnamese are staying there and fighting. As you know, they brought the armored reinforcements up here, and they have linked up with one company, but the enemy has landed 2 or 3 kilometers from the group of North Viet—South Vietnamese that have dug in right adjacent to this position. And they're still fighting, and I think that the, the fact that they are still there and holding on under this intensive fighting is an indication that they are certainly fighting well. The casualties are very heavy on the North Vietnamese side. I'm—I'm sure the forces of the South Vietnamese will suffer casualties, but the—in other words, I think the most encouraging part is that they didn't break and, and blew 'em away—

Nixon: Those people on Hill 31, they have been the survivors of that other hill we lost and moved in with them. Is that right—?

Moorer: No, sir. No, sir. That was—this was independent of that. That operation was back over here. This is a separate operation.

Nixon: Yeah. Yeah.

Moorer: What they did, and you're quite correct, the 39th Battalion, in the first action that you were reported to, did join up with the 21st—

⁴ According to one account, the South Vietnamese suffered 155 killed and missing in the battle and estimated that they had killed 250 of the enemy. (Ibid., p. 85)

Nixon: Yeah?

Moorer: —but they were not related to this action over here.

Nixon: Now, with regard to General Abrams' plan to replace the Airborne with the Marines—that'll take about a week, or—?

Moorer: Yes, sir. I think so. I've asked him, though, what time then that's going to be. If you look over here, you'll see where these Marines are. You see, the green—

Nixon: Yeah?

Moorer: —indicates the position of the South Vietnamese. There are some of the Marines here. Some of them are back here in reserve; they'll be brought forward—

Nixon: Uh-huh.

Moorer: —but, he'll, he'll move them in there in a few days, I—I'm pretty sure.

Nixon: Fine.

Moorer: And then at [unclear]. Also, he wanted to bring up that one brigade which would be moving in there to replace this one. I think it would come across. [unclear]—

Nixon: What about the balance of the reserves that he has in South Vietnam? He still has—after he moves these—he will still have [unclear] reserves in South Vietnam? But it—it—it—the point that Mel raised after our meeting yesterday was that—or maybe it was during the [unclear] meetings—the North Vietnamese were—must be making a major effort to, to cut off those, go to the rear of our force—the South Vietnamese forces that are on Route 9, and cut 'em off. Is that—is that action—? What does our intelligence show in that respect?

Moorer: Well, there was an intelligence report to the effect that two regiments were moving almost directly south.

Nixon: Right.

Moorer: On—just down the line, more or less.

Nixon: Right.

Moorer: As you know, the—

Nixon: What are we doing? Just punishing them with air, or—?

Moorer: Yes, sir. We—we're doing more than that. We're putting out patrols, and, of course, when they get over there to the South Vietnamese side, then they are up against [unclear] forces. But we have right here a very large fire support base, and we have artillery, and we are covering this with 24-hour attacks. With all of that, General Abrams, of course, has all the intelligence. And, here again, there may be some enemy fire, but I think that—Mr. Helms will back me up—here, for the first time in a long time, we have the North Vietnamese willing, apparently willing, to commit as much as a battalion, which they haven't done in a long, long time.

Nixon: Well, what the North Vietnamese are obviously doing, it seems is to—is to make a major effort—

Moorer: I think—

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: Now they're trying to conserve their forces. Not fighting in the Giap-fashion, but going all out to break the back of this thing. Is that correct?

Rogers: That's correct. Did we get any intercepts that [unclear]? Do we have any conversations—?

Moorer: Yes, sir.

Rogers: You know what I mean—?

Helms: Well, we do have some conversations. Conversations saying, "Stand and fight." I mean, definite orders to these units. This is the first time we've seen this in, oh, literally years.

Moorer: Not only that, but they're establishing headquarters—
[unclear exchange]

Nixon: You said what?

Moorer: They've established headquarters down here, sir, 70B they call it, to control the entire operation.⁵ Heretofore, they've been leaving the actions in the different base areas up to the local commanders. And, now, they have headquarters—

Nixon: Right. I assume that our Air—Air—Air Force, as usual, does not have the capacity to know how to hit such headquarters, is that correct?

Moorer: Well, sir, if they get the top men over at the headquarters, of course, they will lay the B-52 strikes on this target. [unclear] have to recognize that these generals move—

Nixon: Is that right—?

Moorer: —everyday. They move from one place to another. By the time you know they're, uh—

Nixon: Yeah.

Moorer: [unclear] are reported to be down there in the Lam Son— or rather the Chup Operation, we did pick up the headquarters, laid down a B-52 strike, and killed the 20th Headquarters area here a few days ago.⁶

⁵ North Vietnamese corps-level organization formed in southern North Vietnam and central Laos in October 1970 to defend against an anticipated large attack by United States and South Vietnamese ground forces.

⁶ Reference is to the 20th PAVN Rear Services Group.

Nixon: One point, Dick, that concerned me, and I saw on television and so forth, and the news summaries, that our intelligence people are saying that our intelligence is inefficient, inadequate, bad, and that that's the reason that we're, we're running into more resistance than was expected—

Helms: Mr. President, resistance is precisely what we expected. It's—it's been there, we outlined it before the plan ever kicked off—

Nixon: They both—they both—they both quote, "A high official said—"

Helms: What if that high official doesn't know? When we were in here briefing you long before this operation kicked off, we identified all of those units surrounded on the map, and [unclear].

Moorer: We—we thought [unclear].

Nixon: I don't suppose [unclear] find the high official who said this—

Helms: [unclear]

Nixon: All right. Go ahead.

Moorer: Well, sir, that's our—that's about it. As I say here, of course, it's night over there, now. They'll start in, again, first thing in the morning. General Abrams reports that General Lam is very resolute and—

Nixon: Yeah.

Moorer: And, now, one other interesting aspect of this is the sensors indicated, indicated in the last 24 hours, which just confirms what we talked about yesterday, I think, in the sense that if you look at what's happening on these firebases. You see, here on [Route] 922, which is a route in through Base Area—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Moorer: —611, the traffic is down by nine trucks. In [Route] 9G, which, of course, is the one that they had tried again, is—well, they've got zero yesterday, and two northbound and five southbound today. This could have been—We do know that there's something going on to put a strike in. We do know that there's some enemy forces on that road, and so, these five trucks could have been, I suppose, anything. Let me turn to Route 99, which goes off to the south, where as we had, three or four days ago, 86 and 80, yesterday, we had 14 trucks and some of them were knocked off by air.

Nixon: Very important.

Moorer: And—But only, only 30. Then, you go to Route 914B, which is the one we've all been so interested in. They—the one that comes down here.

Laird: Yeah.

Moorer: It was a—

[unclear exchange]

Moorer: —the 23rd [of February]—

Laird: Going up the “Kissinger Trail.”

[laughter]

Moorer: The 23rd was a 100, the 24th was 84, yesterday 28, and today 17. And so, I think that, overall, there’s no question about the fact that they have slowed this, it appears. Now, I just had a briefing on the input through the passes.

Nixon: Yeah, and one aside: that very little figure is still valid, but [unclear]. The press will get it out, and so forth. In other words, there’s so many traps before this began and so many now [unclear]. These are things people understand, right?

Moorer: Well, we haven’t enough. I, I—I could give you some better charts and that’s it to show that and make that point, but not— Now, our intelligence indicates, also, that—and this is about five days old now, because it takes that long to accumulate—In any event, the input through those passes has been high. So, the point up to this, there’s still a tremendous amount of material north of this area we’re operating in.

Rogers: But that, Tom, is what I said is a source of confusion. You read in the papers, somebody says the—

Nixon: [unclear]—

Rogers: —it’s a lot more traffic—

[unclear exchange]

Rogers: Now, what it is: it’s traffic in, but not out. What we’re trying to do is cut it off. I mean, the traffic below Tchepone is greatly reduced.

Moorer: That’s right.

Rogers: But that, as you read—sometimes read in the papers—

Nixon: That’s what it’s all about.

[unclear exchange]

Moorer: It’s wrong. It’s just wrong.

Rogers: That’s right.

Moorer: Yeah, I mean, there’s no question about it.

Nixon: Yeah.

Moorer: [unclear] General Abrams, and watching the timing of these operations, and—they’re making their preliminary movements, and I’m sure that they are going to go right ahead. And I think it’s— Again, the encouraging thing is that the ARVN showed that in the worst kind of environment, they could—were willing to stand and fight.

Nixon: On Hill 31?

Moorer: Yes, sir.

Nixon: Well, or they lose it. If they do, so—so be it. The main thing is they fought.

Moorer: But the other side, Mr. President, we, we will never know how many they really lose. [unclear]

Moorer: [*4 seconds not declassified*]

Nixon: Yeah.

Moorer: —indirect [unclear], we'll never know—

Nixon: Yeah. A question, with regard to the DMZ: the major purpose, of course, of statements in which we have deliberately left fuzzed up, with the North Vietnamese—the South Vietnamese, what they do in North Vietnam. The purpose of that, of course, is not because they're going North. We all know that. They can't do it without our support. But, I don't think at this point, I think the main purpose of that is to tie those forces down. Isn't that true, what I said?

Moorer: Exactly.

Nixon: That they have a free shot. They just move our guys out of there and come on over here.

Moorer: As you see, they have not reduced the total number of forces, at least going back there, though, right on the DMZ they—

Nixon: How many Americans—how many Americans across that section are facing the DMZ approximately?

Moorer: Well, in this general area, we have about 9,000.

Nixon: I see. Huh? Only 9,000?

Moorer: Yes, sir—

Laird: American combat troops.

Moorer: American combat forces right there, sir.

Nixon: Right.

Moorer: We're talking about the helo operations, and support people, and add those people on Khe Sanh.

Nixon: Okay, at Khe Sanh. Did you mean the total at Khe Sanh, and clear across that whole bottom half of the DMZ, there're only 9,000 American forces?

Moorer: There's about nine—

Nixon: I know about combat. I want to know about all Americans. How many are in the region?

Moorer: [unclear]

Nixon: Oh, I mean the whole goddamn bunch. What is it?

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: 50,000?

Laird: [unclear] to Da Nang and through there—

Moorer: That's right. It depends on how far you go, go south—

Nixon: All right.

[unclear exchange]

Moorer: But they—Traditionally, they have 8,000 up here, and we have about 9,000 in this blocking position.

Nixon: Now, the point—the point I'm making has nothing to do with how many combat, military, or any of that. It has to do with: how many Americans might be vulnerable, in the case that the people are going to be there when those in North Vietnam thought they had a free shot at coming across? Now, is it 9,000 combat? Or is it 25,000 or 50,000—

Moorer: [unclear]

Nixon: —Americans? Forget combat—

Moorer: Yes, sir. I think it's about—Well, I think the figure's 29,000 based on my knowledge—

Nixon: I'd like to verify it again. Get that figure—

Moorer: Should we go all the way down to—It depends on where you stop, Mr. President.

[unclear exchange]

Moorer: If you include all of Military Region I.

Nixon: Fine, Military Region I. That's great. Just get me that there [unclear exchange] below the DMZ. That, really, is what this is all about. [unclear] Now, the second point is that, with regard to the, with regard to the whole business about [unclear] and so forth and so on, it, it—we, we—as we all know, in this room, the purpose of that is [unclear] just like your little running, your, your boat up there with 5,000 Marines on it, sending them for a field trip, with boats and the rest, to keep them worried over there, and at least tie down a few of their people, so that they don't come running around over here and get these guys. Is that true?

Moorer: Yes, sir.

Laird: Now, we were—During the meeting with [unclear] said he wants more this week—

Nixon: Good.

Laird: —and—

Nixon: That's all right.

Laird: —there is—we've been watching those pass areas up there and getting the best kind of intelligence that we can. Both CIA and DIA have been working closely together.

Nixon: Well—

Laird: There is a substantial amount up there, but I think it would be worthwhile, maybe—but I didn't think it was going to be—

Nixon: [unclear]

Laird: —this weekend.

Nixon: We've got another week to go.

Laird: Because—

Nixon: I'm sorry, but, but we will present that, though. We—I'm going to talk about that. But, understand: it's militarily that can have the effect of tying those people down. That's all.

Moorer: It's already doing it, sir. We've got intercepts—

Nixon: I know, I know, but I'd keep hitting that pass area.

Laird: Well, I think, probably, Monday, Tuesday, or sometime in there would be a good time to do it.

Nixon: Well, give us, though, before we do that there, that'll be a decision, we want this group to sit, and we'll, we'll hear the arguments, and so forth. The second point is that I noted this morning—and I almost laughed about this—[American] infantry will be sent into Vietnam in order to rescue 'em and so forth. [unclear] But, you know, I must say John Cooper⁷ came through. The only, the only bright thing we got in the news is where he said, "Why, of course, we've got go in and rescue people." But the point that I make is this: was it necessary to say—I mean, 'cause we're rebuilding, the rest [unclear]? Well, it's too late now.

Rogers: I always thought we always said that. Didn't we always say—?

Laird: Well, we've said that in their testimony, Bill [unclear].

[unclear exchange]

Rogers: Who said that, though? I—

Laird: Lugar⁸ asked a question at the briefing: whether we're going to continue search and rescue missions, with combat forces in the missions—

Nixon: Yeah.

Laird: —and we've always said that we would, Bill.

Rogers: Of course.

⁷ Senator John Sherman Cooper (R-KY).

⁸ Senator Richard G. Lugar (R-IN).

Nixon: That's what Son Tay was about. Yeah. Only for that purpose, but not for going in there.

Laird: Not for combat purposes.

Nixon: [unclear] it's a rather interesting thing, though, that's picked up by the press [unclear].

Laird: It's nothing new—see, there is nothing new.

Rogers: But where did—was it in a press briefing?

Nixon: No. Where was it said—?

[unclear exchange]

Laird: We had him use the same quotes we used before the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Rogers: Yes—no, no.

Nixon: You know what I would suggest? It's something that's very hard to get across to a press man, but in any event—because the press man always wants to come out of a press briefing and say—and have the guy say, "Gee, that was a good briefing," and it's only a good briefing when the son-of-a-bitch gets news.

[laughter]

Nixon: Don't give 'em news. I told Ziegler, for example, when they ask about, "What, what is the American position about supporting the North—South Vietnamese if they go north?" He says, "Gentlemen, I have nothing new on that. The President covered that completely at his press briefing. What's the next question?"

Rogers: Hmm.

Nixon: Because I did cover it. I said, "Well, obviously, I don't have anything with what the South Vietnamese are going to do [unclear]. As far as our policy, it will be solely dictated in terms of whether or not there's a threat to our forces in the south." And that's true, we all know. Which, really, is, in effect, saying that we won't—And then, if somebody—somebody did ask a question. He says, "Well, what if—what if there were such an operation, would it—and it required a combined thing, and so forth? What would you do?" And I said, "Why, of course, we have no plans to do anything like that." But, you see, the point is, Mel, it makes news—

Laird: Yeah.

Nixon: —whenever a press secretary—and he does a good job—but whenever a press secretary, in answering a question, tries to give the answer directly, rather than telling the son-of-a-bitch in the press, "Gentlemen, I refer you to the Secretary's comment on that. What's the next question?" You see, but that's not news, sir, because there is nothing new. Don't you agree Bill?

Rogers: It's very tough for them to say that, but that's what they should—

Nixon: I do it all the time.

Rogers: —say, “You know, the Secretary said it at various testimonies—”

[Omitted here is additional conversation relating to the press.]

Nixon: You know, the, the other thing is—which I’m sure Abrams was shooting at—that the—up there in Laos, the South Vietnamese could just win one cheap one, just a cheap one. Yeah. Take a stinking hill. Carefully bring back a prisoner or two—anything. I’m sure that has all been brought up.

Moorer: [unclear] I mean, there’s a seizing of men, seizing of prisoners, and killing the 250 survivors—

Nixon: No, but they don’t believe those figures.

Rogers: Tom, there’s no sign of any—

Nixon: Prisoners.

Rogers: —demoralization—deterioration of the South Vietnamese?

Moorer: No—

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: That’s the point that I’m worried about.

Rogers: I think we’ve got to—you’ve got to be sure that everybody out there’s very [unclear]. Even a sign of it, because we can get on it right away—

Nixon: Right.

Rogers: —so that it doesn’t [unclear].

Nixon: We mustn’t have—nothing. The South Vietnamese demoralization has been terribly important.

Moorer: Yes, sir. Well, we, we recognize—

Nixon: The North Vietnamese, I think they’d be getting it when we hit ‘em—

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: What do you think, Dick?

Helms: That’s right. I think, the North Vietnamese are having a rough time. This time, the South Vietnamese stand their ground, and the operation will run out [unclear] when Mel came back from his trip. But they’ll stand and fight, and we can really clobber them, and so forth. They’ll not only take losses in men, but they’ll take losses in supplies.

Nixon: Right, right. Let me say, though—

[Omitted here is additional conversation relating to dealing with the media.]

Nixon: Well, also, the idea, for example, that we—that the operation changes: of course it changes. It changes if you run into a little resistance here, you move in another direction. The idea, though, that

the, the great objective of this was the capture of Tchepone—of course, that may have gotten into the—got in to the dialogue early, but when you really come down to it, everybody in Washington, at least, has talked and chewed it to destruction. Isn't that the word—?

[unclear exchange]

Kissinger: That's one thing we had all agreed on at the WSAG.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: No press spokesman ever used the word Tchepone. We said, "disruption of enemy supplies, Base Areas 604 and 607—"

141. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, March 1, 1971.

SUBJECT

North Vietnamese Infiltration

Since early January it has not been clear whether Hanoi has continued to send new infiltration groups southward, or whether this activity stopped at that time.

—The uncertainty arises because we have not intercepted any more communications from an important enemy way station used by infiltration groups moving through southern North Vietnam.

—Prior to January 5, we were able to intercept messages from this station on a regular basis, and these gave us a timely and accurate picture of enemy infiltration.

—But we have not heard from this station since January 5. At first, it seemed likely that the station was not reporting because there were no infiltration groups moving. We have since learned, however, that this station shifted to a new location on January 5, and that it may no longer need to use a short wave radio to communicate.

—More recently, some infiltration groups have been detected in the Laotian panhandle which almost certainly left North Vietnam sometime after January 5.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 84, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. VI. Secret; Codeword. Sent for information. A stamped note reads, "The President has seen."

This recent information has removed some of the uncertainty, but it has also raised a fairly serious intelligence problem.

—It now seems clear that infiltration from North Vietnam has continued since January 5. We do not yet know the extent of it, but we should have a better idea as other infiltration groups are detected on the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

—It is also virtually certain that we have lost our ability to detect infiltration groups moving within North Vietnam. Unless we are able to compensate, our information on infiltration in the future will be much less timely and complete.

I have asked Mr. Helms to conduct a thorough review of our intelligence collection techniques on infiltration and to search for some new exploitable links in the enemy's infiltration system.

142. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker)¹

Washington, March 1, 1971, 2224Z.

WHS 1010. I am sending this message on an "exclusively eyes only" basis. It is a personal communication with no official status. It is caused by profound concern that unless my office can get a conceptual grip on the situation, the most serious consequences for our entire Vietnam policy could develop. As you know, I fully supported the decision to move into Laos. I remain convinced that the reasoning that led to the decision to undertake these operations was sound. There is certainly no inclination here to second-guess or question the conduct of the tactical battle, and no one is more aware than I of the difficulties which nitpicking from Washington can generate. I consider General Abrams one of our great commanders. Everyone here has full confidence in him. Nevertheless, I am profoundly concerned by the way the situation is evolving and for that reason, I would be most grateful if you would meet privately with General Abrams and discuss my concerns with him. But please do not show him this cable. It is so frank because of our own personal friendship.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 84, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. VI. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only.

Fundamental to the future success of our objectives in Southeast Asia is the maintenance of a minimum basic confidence here that the actions we have taken thus far offer hope of leading to a situation in which the South Vietnamese will be able increasingly to manage their own defenses as U.S. forces continue to be withdrawn at rates comparable to those of the past. The President's decision to support Lam Son 719 was based on his confidence that the Laos trail network would be disrupted with some impact on the enemy's ability to undertake offensive operations during this dry season and the next as well. Frankly, I am beginning to wonder what if anything has been achieved in this regard. Since the operation has been launched, the President has received reports on a wide range of modifications to the plan brought on by the host of very real difficulties with which the ARVN had been confronted, only to discover that events on the ground and subsequent operational reporting have not been consistent with the forecasts. Specifically, we have found ourselves in the following position:

(1) The President was initially briefed to the effect that ARVN forces would seize Tchepone four to five days after H-Hour.

(2) On February 15, he was told that weather, supply problems, conditions on Route 9, and enemy resistance would delay achieving this objective for a period of 8 to 10 days.

(3) Subsequently the President was informed that Tchepone was less important because all routes going through Tchepone were being cut southeast of Tchepone.

(4) Subsequently, the President was informed that a modified scheme of maneuver would be adopted which would place two regiments attacking on a northeast axis along Route 914 and the high ground to the north with the objective of seizing Tchepone.

Since receiving information on these various conceptual approaches, events on the ground have not confirmed our ability to accomplish them. This has quite naturally resulted in concerns here as to the overall future outlook of the operation. An additional factor which concerns me greatly is the limited ARVN strength which has been involved in this operation at a time when the enemy has obviously committed his full resources.

We fear that this ARVN strength is not only insufficient to accomplish the mission but is also so weak that significant portions of it can be overrun. If that happens, and if the ARVN must pull back, nothing fundamental will be changed—either here or in South Vietnam—by the argument that Hanoi casualties were even heavier than ours. Husbanding reserves will not help now because there will not be the domestic basis for another battle.

I would like to emphasize that both the President and I have full confidence in General Abrams and recognize the immense difficulties

which he faces, not only in supporting the ARVN in a most difficult tactical situation but in influencing them to undertake operations which may not necessarily reflect their own wishes. As you know, no one here in Washington supports what we are trying to accomplish more than I. But we can accomplish nothing unless we face facts. You know what we are up against here. We have just seen the tip of the iceberg in this respect. We will do our best to hold the fort. But we must know what we are up against. There is no chance to keep panic from setting in if we are constantly outstripped by events.

In order to keep the President fully abreast of the future prospects of the Laotian venture, I would be most grateful on a strictly personal basis to have your blunt assessment of what the future holds both in terms of prospects for success and the overall ability of the ARVN to accomplish the mission which it has undertaken. Specifically, what is the reason for the conditions I have described; how well is ARVN really fighting; what can we reasonably expect to achieve; what do the South Vietnamese really think; and finally what do you believe Thieu personally thinks of the operation. I ask for this assessment without any intention of pressuring you or General Abrams with respect to what should be accomplished but rather to obtain from you the most candid appraisal now available so that the President will be best able to handle any difficulties which may arise here and prepare himself for hard choices. You were present in Washington when the decision was made to proceed and only you can know and will fully understand what we are trying to accomplish here. For this reason, I am confident you will not show this message to General Abrams, who may feel obliged to discuss it in military channels. I therefore leave it up to your best judgement as to how best to obtain General Abrams' frank assessment through this channel exclusively.

My good wishes are with you and Abe.

143. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

Assessment of the Laotian Operation

Attached at Tab A is Ambassador Bunker's back channel answer to my request for a blunt assessment of the prospects for success of the current South Vietnamese operation in Laos.² Ambassador Bunker indicates that General Abrams fully shares the views in the report which makes the following points of particular significance:

—There are obvious risks in an operation of this kind in which the enemy understands that we are after his jugular. Without the supply lifeline to the south the enemy would be finished. For this reason, the enemy has brought in substantial numbers of forces and is employing heavy artillery and tanks. Although this makes the job tough, it is one that has to be done. President Thieu and General Vien, as well as General Abrams, share these sentiments.

—The operation has already demonstrated its value. Enemy southward traffic has been virtually eliminated on Routes 9 and 92 and greatly reduced on Route 914.

—The enemy has been forced to accept combat away from the territory of South Vietnam. We once fought the NVA 308th and 320th Divisions around Hue and Danang; now they are being fought in Laos. We once fought the NVA 9th Division around Saigon; now we are fighting it in Cambodia.

—The enemy has lost heavily in tanks, weapons, ammunition and other materiel. His POL pipeline has been cut.

—Even allowing for exaggerated reporting, an enemy casualty figure of 3,742 KIA, means that the enemy has suffered heavily. Combined enemy casualties for the two operations are 6,992 compared with 708 friendly KIA.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 84, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. VI. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Nixon wrote at the top of the memorandum: "Tell him—from RN, 'excellent—honest report. His worst enemy seems to be the press!'" Kissinger relayed Nixon's comment in backchannel message WH1011 to Bunker, March 5, and instructed him to update his message and forward it through regular channels to Rogers and Laird so they could "benefit greatly from this assessment, modified of course to reflect that it has been prepared at your initiative." (Ibid.)

² For Kissinger's request, see Document 142. Tab A is a retyped copy of backchannel message 0341 from Saigon, 1220Z. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 84, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. VI)

—The ARVN units have fought well and with the exception of the airborne division commander, who is apprehensive and mechanical, have been well led.³

—The Ranger Battalion which suffered such heavy losses inflicted three times the number of losses on the enemy. Their spirits are high and they are convinced they have defeated a regiment.⁴ Two battalions of the opposing enemy regiment appear to have been virtually destroyed and have disappeared from intercepts.

—With moves now in progress the ARVN will have a total of about 30,000 troops for employment in Laos. This strength is adequate, although the enemy has committed a large number of forces to the battle.

—U.S. support has been outstanding. Our air effort will be a deciding factor.⁵

—Changes in the original concept of operations have been necessary because of weather,⁶ the condition of Route 9 within Laos, and the Laotian terrain. Weather and enemy action have on occasion delayed evacuation of wounded and resupply operations. However, it is essential to maintain a flexible posture and adapt to fluid conditions.

—The character of the press reporting has been skeptical. Because they were under the impression that Tchepone was the principal objective, the reporters have concluded that the operation has bogged down. Steps are being taken to correct these misimpressions with more effective and frequent briefings.⁷

—There will be some bad moments but President Thieu and General Vien expect hard fighting and are prepared to take heavy losses. They are confident in the quality of their troops and in their ability to inflict heavier losses on the enemy.

—General Abrams and Ambassador Bunker are both confident that if we hold steady on our course the Cambodian and Laotian operations will have the impact on the enemy's activities in South Vietnam and our troop withdrawals which we originally contemplated.

³ Nixon underlined most of this paragraph.

⁴ Nixon underlined most of the first two sentences of his paragraph.

⁵ Nixon underlined this sentence.

⁶ Nixon underlined most of this phrase and highlighted it in the margin.

⁷ Nixon underlined most of the first two sentences in the paragraph and "more effective and frequent briefings."

144. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)¹

Washington, March 3, 1971, 1:30 p.m.

PRESUS: What is the latest evaluation of things? I am going to brief the press corps tomorrow night. *Ans:* We are going to get you, in fact we already have some curves that you asked for but are having them updated which shows the flow of materials.

PRESUS: That would be fine to show that the flow of materials down into SVN is slowed down so that we can show that something positive actually has taken place during the three weeks the ARVN forces have been in there. This is certainly a compliment for these fellows. *Ans:* Yes sir. What I have said in my press releases and conferences is that the degree of success is directly proportional to the disruption of their supplies and the ultimate impact will take awhile to be felt but it is very significant there is no question about that. The SVN are really showering them and showing the importance of their effort. They are certainly fighting and exerting themselves to the utmost so far as they are concerned, the SVN continue their preparations and their movements into Laos. There has been some heavy fighting up around the two FSB which are 30 and 31. Gen Abrams told me last evening, and in addition, they have moved one battalion further west along just south of Highway 9.

PRESUS: Do they airlift those in? *Ans:* Yes sir, but we lost some helicopters. Nevertheless, they did get in all right.

PRESUS: Was it a substantial loss of helicopters?—*Ans:* We don't know yet. About five we believe but I don't think many people were hurt in the process. This, of course, is the furthest West we had a unit of this size. We have the SVN significantly reenforced their tanks and there is a group of several tanks moving along Highway 9 towards the intersection of 92. There have been some sharp clashes where they have succeeded in killing several of the enemy and, according to Gen Abrams, he expects tonight when it gets daylight out there again for the fighting to really resume at a rather fast pace between 194—south-west and 9—east and west. Over in Tchepone the enemy is bringing in some forces and servicing forces because the trucks and other action over there which indicates I am sure a shuttle action and is joining into 92 at that intersection. The enemy indications are they are hurting for

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Moorer Diary, July 1970–July 1974. No classification marking.

supplies and the flow has been cut off but they are digging in to stay and fight. Now I have been concerned myself about Khe Sanh. I have been working on this for three days talking to people out there. I now have a plan for dispersing their helicopters. Also now that the engineers are finished building the field they are now building revetments for the helicopters, they have established perimeter defenses out to the limits of the rocket range that might be used against Khe Sanh. So it appears to me that everything done has been prudently taken from a military man's point of view that could be done. I am sure they will take a couple of rounds of rocket fire but that area is almost 5 acres so they won't be able to pinpoint any one target at least so, Mr. President, overall at least the fighting will still be heavy and inflict severe casualties on the other side. The SVN has lost people and they know they'll lose more. But generally speaking Gen Abrams feels the SVN are fighting very well.

PRESUS: They are not panicking? *Ans:* No sir. He feels there is still a lot of hard fighting ahead. As you pointed out several times, the longer they stay in there the better the impact will be and in the long run it is more than just a disruption of their supplies. I think if the SVN can show that they can hold their own with the best and have done this so far and put forth greater effort I am sure psychologically it will have a tremendous impact on the NVN overall. Some tough contacts and hard fighting are going on but the SVN continue to go on with their original plans.

PRESUS: How about Cambodia? *Ans:* The Chup Operation. I suppose they are suffering from the loss of Gen Tri² and that the new Commander will take awhile to instill the leadership and faith and confidence the men require. But in one contact they killed 54 enemy soldiers and two other contacts during the night the ARVN lost 10 but they haven't been able to tell us how many the others lost but, nevertheless, they are continuing the other operation. We know they are hurting and have been zeroing in on one area so this is a good sign that they are willing to stand and fight instead of moving around behind and keeping on the go. We are going to lay in some B52 strikes this morning Southwest of Ton-my. In this operation it is going along as well as expected and it is going to last until 1 July. I think they are playing it cool and making certain they have got the necessary reinforcements and support, etc., as they move around in that area.

PRESUS: The ARVN is doing that? *Ans:* That's right. I think as far as the trucks are concerned the NVN are hurting and indications are that they are having a tough job of reestablishing themselves in the

² See footnote 2, Document 140.

sanctuaries that they occupied last year making these SVN operations very satisfactory indeed.

PRESUS: I understand it will be hard . . . is the missile activity across the DMZ increasing? *Ans:* We have had one report saying that it was fired from inside Laos. I don't believe that. We haven't been able to confirm the report because it was seen at night. But, as you know, we are standing by to attack these sites that are just across the border and we are pinning them down now. None of our planes have been hit so far although they have fired quite a few missiles but so far they have avoided contact.

PRESUS: Let me ask in terms of the ARVN's ability to stay in the Southern Laotian thing, we still feel that despite this they are going to get knocked around they can hang in there another month? *Ans:* Yes sir. I don't have any reason to believe otherwise.

PRESUS: We are not shifting our sights at least in that respect? *Ans:* No sir. The enemy for awhile from intercepts said they were expecting some withdrawals (you probably saw it in the Presidential Daily Bulletin) but we have had no more of that the last few days from enemy intercepts but from Gen Abrams and his group no one has the remotest idea of changing their plans.

PRESUS: By the enemy you mean the ARVN would withdraw you mean? *Ans:* That's right.

PRESUS: I didn't see that, no. *Ans:* They may have been referring to the FSB 31 or something like that when we had to withdraw that one battalion (39th) of the Airborne but we replaced it.

PRESUS: How about coming up that road we spoke of? *Ans:* As I told they are at 9 but not on the road—214 that runs southeast from Tchepone area southeast and joins up with 92. The 1st Division is moving forward and bringing all their assembling battalions so they can handle that. Actually we have very few vehicle indicators from sensors yesterday. The truck kills, etc., are up, and also down that whole complex Highway 23 all the way over to the west we have had no moving traffic on that.

PRESUS: That's out in the open more? *Ans:* Yes, we have four battalions of irregulars cutting trees in three or four different places and at least nothing but local trucks are getting by there if any. They haven't succeeded in rerouting the traffic.

PRESUS: How about Highway 9? *Ans:* We haven't had any in several days. The ARVN are on that one. We have had some tank activity along 94 . . .

PRESUS: What kind of tanks do our people have—what kind do the ARVN have? *Ans:* T41 tanks which is a match for the TF-76 do not have heavy AA gun but the T34 and T54 were seen in Laos for the first

time; however, I just received photographs of tanks destroyed and the ARVN have destroyed 38 tanks overall. But one type of tank is really an armored amphibious vehicle but we have never seen the other types—the T34 and T54.

PRESUS: What approximately is the balance between the tanks in that area? *Ans:* As I told you, they just moved 28 tanks down Highway from SVN but on balance and in consideration of the number the NVN have lost to date, they have more than the advantage because of the air support they get. What they are using these tanks for in this area because it is not flat and you can't use them in the classic sense (as in the Battle of the Bulge), they are mobile armed artillery vehicles and are used for assaults on these positions and we have supplied the ARVN with some additional anti-tank weapons 3½ rocket which is sharply charged with a live load and if they can still for a couple of hundred yards can knock them off. Some of the photographs I have show the tanks bottom up with the tracks up in the air. If the aircraft can get at them in the aircraft can kill them.

PRESUS: Yes, sir! *Ans:* But in the day time they cover them up with all kinds of foliage and use them primarily at night for the mobility aspects for their artillery. We don't have the facts as yet on how many tanks they have gone in there. So far two battalions we know that overall they have about 250 tanks but traditionally they have been kept in the Hanoi/Haiphong/Red River area and haven't used the tanks in this area to speak of except for the 74.

PRESUS: Could they get over here from Hanoi? *Ans:* I'm certain in the long term they could ultimately do it but don't think it would be very feasible but we don't have any firm intelligence in terms of communications intercepts.

PRESUS: I suppose with our air attacks on these tanks, that there are as many as they need and we really don't need more? *Ans:* The ARVN has about all they can handle at the present time and we have looked at the idea of bringing some of their tanks up from Military Region II if they do lose some. They can get some more in there right now. I think they just have as many as they can use and they will put up a helluva fight.

PRESUS: How does Gen Abrams feel, Admiral, is he keeping his poise and everything? *Ans:* No question about him and Gen Vien they both are excellent. Vien is a real tiger in the thing and Gen Abrams recognizes the fact that they having a tough time but he feels they are fighting well. I will talk to him again tonight and I will be happy to call you back.

PRESUS: I will talk to you again tomorrow about this time Admiral.

145. Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, March 4, 1971, 3–3:47 p.m.

SUBJECT

North Laos

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	JCS
State	Lt. Gen. Melvin Zais
Mr. U. Alexis Johnson	Capt. Fred W. Terrell
Ambassador William Sullivan	NSC Staff
Defense	Col. Richard T. Kennedy
Mr. David Packard	Mr. Herbert Levin
Rear Adm. William R. Flanagan	Lt. Col. Bernard Loeffke
CIA	Mr. D. Keith Guthrie
Lt. Gen. Robert E. Cushman	
Mr. William Nelson	

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. *Extra Firepower for Thai SGUs.* CIA and JCS will report within one week on steps that could be taken to provide additional firepower to the Thai SGUs employed in North Laos.

2. *Thai SGUs vs. Thai Regulars.* The consensus of the WSAG was that, taking into account military effectiveness, legal restrictions, and administrative and command arrangements, it was preferable to employ Thai SGUs rather than Thai regular troops in North Laos.

3. *Tactical Options in North Laos.* With regard to the four options submitted by the field, the WSAG agreed that Option 1 (an advance from Xieng Khouangville to Phou Teung) should not be undertaken. A choice among the remaining three options should be left to the field, although the field was to be informed that Option 4, calling for an attack northwest from Long Tieng, appeared preferable to the WSAG.

It was agreed to authorize Amb. Unger to provide a further briefing to the Thais on the situation in North Laos and to inform them that we did not consider Option 1 feasible.

4. *Air Support.* The WSAG agreed that additional air support in North Laos should be provided through a combination of:

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Nodis. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House.

(a) Six US Army helicopters to be brought from Korea and to be flown by pilots arranged for by CIA.

(b) US Air Force A-1s based at Udorn.

5. *TACAN*. JCS will report to the WSAG on the capability to provide alternative air navigational facilities in the event of loss of the TACAN station near Long Tieng.

6. *Refugees*. State, Defense, and CIA representatives advised that existing plans for removing and supporting Meo refugees were adequate.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

146. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, March 5, 1971.

SUBJECT

Cambodian Army Morale and ARVN Operations

As you requested, our Defense Attaché in Phnom Penh has provided information on the status of FANK morale and on the effectiveness of ARVN operations in Cambodia.² The major points follow.

Morale. The morale of FANK forces remains high.

—Some are tired, but most feel more secure and capable.

—Almost 20,000 have been trained and equipped in either South Vietnam or Thailand, and about two new battalions are now returning to Cambodia every 10 to 12 days.

—These trained troops are quite effective, and the best of them will hopefully be assigned the highest priority missions. Leadership at the battalion and brigade level, however, remains a problem.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 512, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. XII. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen." Smyser sent it to Kissinger under a covering memorandum, March 2, recommending that he forward it to Nixon. Haig approved for Kissinger.

² In backchannel message 537 to Haig, February 28, Ladd provided the requested information. (Ibid.)

—FANK has made remarkable progress under difficult conditions but one must not forget that it is an amateur military force with only modest support involved in an active war.

ARVN Operations. ARVN operations against the enemy in Cambodia are generally effective.

—Certain ARVN units, however, have committed some outrageous acts against the Cambodian people.

—Coordination between ARVN and FANK ranges from excellent to poor.

—If there is close contact between senior leaders on both sides, coordination at lower levels is generally good. Contacts at the senior level seem to depend more on personalities and friendships than on an objective, systematic approach.

—In sum, coordination between FANK and ARVN is not as close and effective as it should be, but it is improving.

The security situation. The overall security situation in Cambodia is better.

—As FANK grows and improves, it gains more flexibility. And for the moment at least, enemy main forces are having to contend with the ARVN.

—Small and occasionally dramatic enemy attacks, along with terrorist incidents, can be expected almost anywhere. They draw attention but don't have a great effect on national security.

—Phnom Penh could be subjected to a rocket or mortar attack, but no major military attack is anticipated. An enemy buildup for such an effort would take time and would surely not go undetected.

Lon Nol. The military has been functioning well since Lon Nol's illness.³

—In fact, a number of programs have been proceeding better because of his absence. Subordinates who previously had to check out all details with him are now free to act on their own.

—Lon Nol's return will be welcomed, of course, because he is a leader who acts as a powerful unifying force.

—But he should be advised to give up some of his previous duties and allow others to make some of the decisions as they have now begun to do. Otherwise, there could be friction and a loss of efficiency as well.

³ In a March 6 memorandum to Nixon on actions in Cambodia, Kissinger noted that Lon Nol would be released soon from Tripler Hospital in Hawaii and would convalesce there for another month before returning to Cambodia. (*Ibid.*, Box 582, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Actions on Cambodia, Vol. VII)

147. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker)¹

Washington, March 9, 1971.

We understand from General Abrams that GVN is now thinking of withdrawing from Laos during the month of March and resting on their laurels following publicized seizure of Tchepone. For this reason, I wanted you to know the President's views concerning the duration of Lamson 719:

1. We are, of course, prepared to accept General Abrams judgment on the duration of the operation as the absolutely decisive factor, based on his overall assessment of the military situation.

2. However, should there be any other considerations influencing a decision for the early withdrawal of ARVN forces, we want it clearly understood that in our view this is the last chance that ARVN will have to receive any substantial U.S. support on the scale now provided. Thus, this may be our last opportunity to achieve a significant long-range benefit from large offensive operations against the enemy. You may be sure that no artificial deadlines with respect to the provision of U.S. support will govern the duration of the current operation. The earlier administrative deadline of April 5 for the duration of U.S. air support was purely bureaucratic and will be lifted any time you and General Abrams request its extension.

I would urge you to see Thieu and impress upon him the need not to allow the potentially significant benefits of this operation to be sacrificed for short lived publicity based on more limited gains achieved thus far. If military conditions permit, we anticipate that Lamson 719 should run well into the month of April, with the withdrawal scheduled for the period just prior to the end of this dry season.

Thieu should understand that he will have every support from here for the provision of necessary U.S. air assets in Laos and whatever in-country security assists General Abrams considers feasible. From our perspective, every week ARVN stays in Laos represents a serious blow to the enemy's offensive capability, not only for this dry season but, more importantly, for the next.

We have not gone through all of this agony just for the favorable headlines achieved as a result of recent successes and would hope that President Thieu would view the situation from the same perspective.

Warm regards.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 84, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. VI. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. The original is the message as approved by Haig for transmission. Transmitted as message WHS1013.

148. Memorandum From the Director of the Joint Staff (Vogt) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)¹

Washington, March 12, 1971.

SUBJECT

White House Query

1. The President called over about 0820 hours, this morning, asking for an update on the situation in Laos and Cambodia. When apprised of the fact that you were absent, he asked to speak to me. I was called out of the Morning Briefing for this purpose. The President asked the status of Thieu's decision to continue the operation. Harry Train, anticipating this query, had permitted me to read the latest message from Abrams to you on this subject. I told the President that Thieu was relaxed and confident, and desired to keep the pressure up on the enemy and had made no decision to pull the forces out prematurely. The President said he had heard reports that they might want to leave early, and I told him that there was no indication from Thieu that he would, in fact, leave before the job was done. The President indicated that it would be bad, politically, if we did leave prematurely, since certain people would charge that we had been forced out and that the mission had failed. He, then, asked me how the operation was proceeding, and I told him that we continue to find additional caches, and that the enemy was clearly suffering heavy casualties.

2. The President's primary concern, and, I think, the real reason for his call, was the strike in the North. He asked why it had not gone. I told him it was strictly a matter of weather. He said can you assure me that it's weather only, and that it is not someone "interpreting" his instructions. I had assured him it was strictly weather, and that I would be in contact with General Clay very shortly, and that I would reaffirm this, personally. The President said he wanted it made absolutely clear that this strike was to go, and that it was to go in a timely manner when weather permitted, and that there should be no restraints placed on it.² He, then, asked if we were restricting our bombing in Southeast

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Moorer Diary, July 1970–July 1974. Top Secret. Prepared by Vogt.

² Nixon's concern that the weather was interfering with air strikes was evident on March 11, when he and Kissinger discussed the North Vietnamese casualty figure from the day before. According to a tape recording of their conversation, Kissinger explained that the B-52s were quite effective—accounting for 361 casualties on March 10—when weather permitted. After Nixon's insistence that the strikes continue, Kissinger replied, "Well, it's the weather, Mr. President. The passes would be ideal; they're choked-full now. But we can't do it until that front moves out of there because we don't want to do a half-baked strike." (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 466–12)

Asia in support of Lam Son because of funding limitations. I assured him that we were not, and that you had sent messages to the field authorizing the maximum sortie capability that the forces could generate, and that funding and bombing limitations were not factors.

3. I immediately called General Clay on the secure phone, and reaffirmed with him that weather was the sole consideration for his not having launched the strike. He assured me the forces are ready, and, in fact, anxious to go. I relayed this information to Henry Kissinger so that he could reassure the President. I have not discussed this conversation with anyone since I was, in fact, acting for you in what, I am certain, the President wanted to be a highly confidential matter between you and him. This is the only copy of this memorandum.

John W. Vogt
Lieutenant General, USAF

149. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Saigon, March 12, 1971, 1120Z.

495. Refs: A. WHS 1013.² B. Saigon 458.³

1. General Abrams and I have had a long and what what we both feel has been a very satisfactory talk with Thieu today. General Abrams will be reporting on our discussion and the conclusions we reached through his channels.⁴

2. We discussed the problems which we felt would be raised in following the plan outlined in my 458 to you. These included the loss of momentum if RVNAF were to be withdrawn from Laos for a rest period, to be followed later by a move into Base 611 and the Ashau areas, and the political and public relations problems which such a procedure would raise, i.e., whether it might not appear that RVNAF forces

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 84, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. VI. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

² Document 147.

³ Not found.

⁴ COMUSMACV message 140425Z, March 14. See footnote 2, Document 150.

had been forced to withdraw despite the heavy casualties inflicted on the enemy; how such a move would be interpreted by the South Vietnam, American, and international press; the effect this would have on the political situation in South Vietnam; the fact that a return to Laos after withdrawal might be considered a new venture and give critics of the present operation something new to hang on to.

3. Thieu replied that he also had been concerned about these matters. He wondered also whether, having said on February 8 that the operation would be limited in time and space, RVNAF could return to Laos having once been withdrawn.

4. General Abrams then gave his analysis of the situation, and Thieu responded by exploring what the enemy might be able to do after the end of the dry season in Laos this year and what his tactics might be in the following year.

5. Thieu then summed up his views for Lam Son 719, as well as for the future, which I am giving only in rough outline, since General Abrams' message will cover it in detail:

A) RVNAF troops will not be withdrawn from Laos, but units will be rotated and temporarily withdrawn for rest when needed. The Airborne Division will be withdrawn first. It will return to action after rest and refitting.

B) The 51st Regiment of the 1st Division and a Marine brigade, which have not been engaged, will be used for rotation with the troops to be withdrawn.

C) The Route 914 area will continue to be exploited by the 1st ARVN and Marine Divisions, probably until about the first of April.

D) RVNAF forces would then move south to Base 611 and the Ashau area, and would exploit these areas as long as necessary.

6. General Abrams and I both feel that this represents a satisfactory plan for Lam Son 719. Thieu shares our perspective of the operation and the public image it must have. As outlined more specifically in General Abrams' message I believe the plan meets the points raised in your WHS 1013.

7. Best regards.

150. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, March 15, 1971.

SUBJECT

South Vietnamese Operations in Laos and Cambodia

Attached at Tab A² is a report from General Abrams on the operations in Laos and Cambodia. The report discusses the impact on the enemy, current status, and his views concerning the conduct of the final phases of these operations.

LAOS

Impact on Enemy. The report makes the following points concerning the impact on the enemy of the Laotian operation:

—Of the ten NVN regiments committed, six have suffered significant casualties. The enemy has lost an estimated one-third of the 30 battalions and one-quarter of the 12,000 rear-service personnel in the area.

—These losses will have a major impact on the enemy strategic reserve and strategic plans.

—Recent reports indicate that the enemy is experiencing morale problems as a result of severe losses.

—The operation has caused substantial disruption of the overall enemy logistics efforts and major disruption in Base Area 604.

—While the total effect of the operation on the enemy's logistics efforts cannot be fully assessed, most of the truck movement in the northern area appears to be in direct support of the battle. Greater use of Route 23 for the first time is indicative of the criticality with which the enemy views his logistics situation in South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 84, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. VI. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² Attached but not printed is a retyped copy of COMUSMACV message 140425Z from Abrams to McCain, March 14. Moorer also forwarded excerpts to Rogers in memorandum CM-704-71, March 16, excluding the sections on Thieu's plans for Lam Son 719. He noted only that the information was from a recent Abrams message, adding that they provided a good view of results to date and should be useful in Rogers' congressional and press discussions. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 VIET S)

—The significant decrease in enemy activities and inability to mount a counterattack last week indicates that the enemy is attempting to resupply and reorganize units which were severely hurt during initial battles.

—Although the enemy has lost well over one-half the tanks sent into the battle area, additional reinforcements are being sent to support infantry units.

—By South Vietnamese standards, the move to Tchepone was a landmark and it was undoubtedly costly to the enemy.

Current Situation. In commenting on the current situation, General Abrams reports that:

—The enemy now has five under-strength regiments north of Route 9 with an additional regiment probably on the way from North Vietnam. There are also five under-strength regiments south of Route 9, with another regiment moving from northern South Vietnam to the area. The southern enemy units are more dispersed and more difficult to support from North Vietnam.

—Although helicopter losses were moderately heavy during the initial phases of the campaign they were not excessive considering the number of sorties flown. Present and projected aircraft levels are satisfactory to meet campaign requirements as well as continue Vietnamization transfers on schedule.

—There appear to be no major logistical problems in the near future.

Future Plans. In assessing future plans for the operation, General Abrams notes that:

—President Thieu sees the remaining goals as the Route 914–C complex, Muong Mong area, Base Area 611 and the Ashau area (See map at Tab B).³ Attacks into these areas, except Ashau, would be most effective from current South Vietnamese positions in Laos.

—The withdrawal phase of the operation includes plans for the neutralizing of enemy forces and destruction of stockpiles and facilities in Base Area 611. Attacks into the area may be conducted both from the northwest and from the border (Ashau) area in South Vietnam. The month and a half remaining prior to the monsoon transitional period should permit this.

—As the ARVN attacks south and east into Base Area 611 some enemy elements north of Route 9 will probably join those to the south to defend the area.

³ Attached but not printed.

—The extent of South Vietnam's effort in Base Area 611 will depend on a sound rotational plan, enemy pressure, and weather. To continue to be effective, South Vietnamese units must be rotated, refitted and rested.

CAMBODIA

With respect to the Cambodian operation General Abrams states that:

—The first phase has been completed. The reentry into the Chup Plantation and successful operations in the Dambe and Chhlong areas are noteworthy accomplishments (See map at Tab C).⁴

—The enemy has changed tactics and has resisted the ARVN operations in this area. This is indicative of the seriousness with which the enemy views possible loss of control of this area, which is the southern terminus of the Mekong line of communication that provides a major portion of the logistics support to enemy forces in southern South Vietnam. When the enemy has attacked the ARVN in strength, the enemy has suffered heavy losses.

—The operation has reduced the level of enemy threat to Cambodian areas west of the Mekong and reduced the level of enemy activity in southern South Vietnam.

—The operation has not only disrupted the logistical system but may have interrupted the provision of replacements for enemy units.

—The equivalent of one-third of the 24 enemy battalions committed to defense of the area have been lost.

—The enemy will probably continue to oppose incursions into rear service facilities and will employ economy of forces tactics to conserve personnel and supplies.

CONCLUSIONS

In reflecting on the outlook for the two operations General Abrams advises that:

—The remaining course of the campaign must be directed toward inflicting maximum damage to enemy installations and troop dispositions.

—Weather is a key consideration and will require a flexible timetable during the latter stages of each operation.

—Priority of allocation of resources remains with the Laotian operation.

⁴ Attached but not printed.

—Premature or hasty withdrawal would be a mistake.⁵ The one viable option available is to continue toward an orderly conclusion of both operations with an outcome which reflects hard fought but successful campaigns in Laos and Cambodia.

In endorsing General Abrams' report Admiral McCain emphasizes several points (Tab D):⁶

—Enemy losses of personnel and supplies has put him in a position where he can no longer take the initiative.

—Enemy losses indicate that attainment of his objectives becomes increasingly remote as success of the South Vietnamese forces is assured.

—Barring unforeseen events the South Vietnamese can and will retain the initiative. The favorable tactical situations which now prevail and continued U.S. support will insure an orderly successful conclusion.

⁵ In his message, Abrams wrote the following: "The remainder of the operation should not be tied to a date or tightly defined time frame. The field commanders must retain sufficient latitude within authorities to permit precise yet flexible orchestration of the campaign in a tempo responsive to the vagaries of enemy activity." He ended this paragraph by noting, "Premature or hasty withdrawal contains significant military risk and courts certain North Vietnamese exaggerated claims of South Vietnamese defeat."

⁶ Attached but not printed is a retyped copy of a message from McCain to Moorer, March 14.

151. Backchannel Message From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Saigon, March 16, 1971, 0834Z.

I met with Ambassador Bunker this AM for two hours and discussed the purpose of my visit while receiving his views on inter alia:

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 853, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. VII. Top Secret; Sensitive. In a backchannel message to Bunker, March 12, Kissinger informed him that Nixon had instructed Haig to travel to Phnom Penh, I Corps, and Saigon from March 16 to 20, to assess the situation and speak with Bunker about a number of long-range issues. (Ibid., Box 1013, Haig Special File, Haig Trip File, Haig SEA Trip—Mar 71 [1 of 2])

- situation in Laos and Cambodia;
- domestic GVN political climate;
- President Thieu's attitude on cross-border operations;
- next troop announcement and possible political initiative.

Ambassador was enthusiastic and confident about cross border operations in both Laos and Cambodia. He believes Laotian operations have severely hurt enemy citing sharp punishment to six of enemy's ten regiments and great psychological lift given to ARVN forces especially during recent days. As we suspected he confirmed some initial reluctance and caution on part of GVN and Thieu himself. There was some fear that ARVN losses might be excessive with resultant deleterious impact on ARVN's long-term posture. Since first weeks, however, success has added to ARVN confidence and evidence [garble—of effectiveness of?] U.S. air power has largely dispelled earlier doubts. Ambassador reports that Thieu was under some criticism [garble] after operation was launched and especially during period when it appeared to be bogged down. Since seizure of Tchepone criticism has subsided and operation is becoming definite political-plus for Thieu. Ambassador Bunker is confident that Thieu is determined to see Laos operation thru and anticipates it will continue largely through month of April but correctly feels specific time table should be avoided. Ambassador is also confident that Cambodian operation will pick up in effectiveness in coming weeks.

Ambassador will give priority attention to political initiative we discussed prior to my departure and will provide you with his views on an exclusively eyes-only basis via this channel.

We also discussed following possible scenario for next tranches of troop withdrawals. (Incidentally, General Abrams had provided Ambassador with troop level figures which MACV briefing team brought to Secretary Laird this week.)

Step 1—On April 5, President might announce drawdown of 30,000 troops between 1 May and 1 July noting that he plans to meet with President Thieu in July to discuss further plans after more careful assessment of results of cross-border operations. President could use occasion to cite initial results of Laos and Cambodian offensives which are beginning to be quite impressive and which have not yet been given comprehensive or analytic disclosure at high level, 30,000 figure substantially exceeds 12,500 rate averaged thus far. Therefore, even though period to be covered is limited the report can be essentially optimistic. Announcement of meeting with Thieu in July should generate positive press momentum which will peak in July.

Step 2—Both Presidents meet at suitable Pacific location in early July. As result of meeting, President Thieu could announce that he has informed President Nixon that effective January 1, 1972, he will no

longer require U.S. ground forces for security of GVN but has asked that necessary air and technical, logistics and intelligence support continue to be provided. President Nixon might reply to effect he welcomes Thieu's decision and announce he will continue orderly withdrawal of US forces at rate consistent with past capabilities and need to insure responsible handling of US equipment and assets. He should emphasize that US forces must however continue to actively defend themselves as required and issue new warning to enemy to effect that he will take necessary action to protect withdrawing US forces. He could also announce new force level of 200,000 by Jan 1, 1972.

Meeting could also provide setting for political initiative which would best be made by Thieu and which would encompass terminal date for complete US withdrawal in return for prisoner exchange and possibly ceasefire. Another option for political initiative would be for both Presidents to agree privately to such an initiative but to withhold making offer public until just after GVN elections.

Ambassador Bunker is enthusiastic about possibilities of above game plan and will provide us with his views on timing and details of political initiative along this line on a priority basis. With or without political initiative, President Thieu would benefit greatly from meeting with President prior to his elections and positive momentum could be achieved reflecting further success of Vietnamization program.

I am meeting with General Abrams this afternoon and again with Ambassador Bunker this evening. Tomorrow party will travel to Cambodia. On Thursday I will visit I Corps returning Friday for meeting with General Davidson at II field forces. Will depart Saigon Saturday PM transportation permitting. Best regards.²

² Kissinger wrote in a March 17 backchannel message to Haig: "I hope you will impress on Abrams and Bunker how important it is for ARVN to stay in Route 914–Route 234 complex for as long into April as possible. If they withdraw prematurely, we will miss a decisive interruption of supplies. This is their last shot at major U.S. support." (Ibid.)

152. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)¹

Washington, March 16, 1971, 8:58 a.m.

PRESUS: Hello. *Ans:* Good morning, Mr. President, how are you?

PRESUS: Fine, Admiral, what is the morning report today on Laos?

Ans: Things are going pretty well. As you know, the weather is tough, but we still are managing to fly a bit.

PRESUS: Still no opening in the weather in the north to hit those three passes? *Ans:* No, sir, we have a satellite picture and it shows that the area is still covered with clouds but the weather, as a whole, is moving out and should be favorable in the next 48 hours. I think it is going to be bad inside . . .

PRESUS: Is it bad inside Laos? *Ans:* It is bad but yesterday we were able to fly 387 fixed wing sorties in addition we saw a significant reduction in traffic flow to the south on the main highways down north. Significantly within the general area that they are carrying out their plan to move down Highway 914. As you probably have noticed in the papers this morning there was quite a bit on the FSB Lolo. Actually, what has happened there is that they have just moved to higher ground at the same point. But the newspapers are suggesting that they “fled”—this is not the case.

PRESUS: This is just a typical newspaper story. *Ans:* They have been in contact with various elements of the enemy throughout the entire area of where 914 and 9 join and the B52s are also working in there. That is the SVN are moving down to . . . all up and down . . . Highway 914. By and large the movement through that general area is certainly severely disrupted. So I think it is going right along. I think when the weather improves which is bound to do in a day or so they will be more effective in some of the helicopter work and TACAIR work which has been going on.

PRESUS: They are going ahead pretty well, at least the plan is still coming off? *Ans:* The SVN are still set to hang in there for 3 or 4 weeks.

PRESUS: Are they going to move to the South? *Ans:* Yes and that is a good idea and not just sit in their positions.

PRESUS: The traffic can't get through them? *Ans:* No since they are moving back and forth but I am watching these very carefully es-

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Moorer Diary, July 1970–July 1974. No classification marking.

pecially the road connecting Highway 23 which connects to the one to the West 9 and 912 the old complex Ho Chi Minh Trail, to the east—they are attempting to reconstruct that crossroad (east and west). I think the fact that they have been going to such effort . . . the fact that they are going ahead before established defenses or anything of that kind indicates how desperate they are. I have ordered Gen Clay to watch this daily and he has sent me pictures of the road. I have ordered him to seed the road with delayed action bombs and to see to it that they don't use the road to the west. Traffic is very light. As you know, there are four irregular battalions on that road and last night the action was light knocking off some construction vehicles. But overall it is very good both north and south of Tchepone area. I think we are really working on them.

PRESUS: I noticed a couple of days ago they have got a few more tanks with airplanes? [Ans:] Yes, sir, last night on Highway 9 five were destroyed and two were damaged so that shows how effective it has been.

PRESUS: This is bound to have some effect on these people. Ans: They have lost nearly 100 tanks. Every time they bring them down they will get knocked off. They are trying to cover them up with bamboo and trying everything to make them blend in with the terrain but they are picking them out and working on them. I don't think the tanks have been of any real impact on this operation because the losses have been so heavy. We do have word that they are bringing some more tanks that are still in NVN but they will get picked off when they get down there.

PRESUS: When the "window" opens you should be able to get alot of stuff in those passes. Ans: Yes it will be a job for them simply to supply these troops over and above their efforts to push the supplies through and much of the sensor activity we have been watching is related to their military actions in a local sense and transfer of supplies all the way through their system.

PRESUS: I guess the people and truck traffic is heavy down below, too. Ans: It is very significantly reduced down below.

PRESUS: How is the morale of the SVN? Hanging in there pretty good? Ans: They are fighting well and we have no indications otherwise. Of course, they are commencing rotation of units to give them a little rest but they have to do that in normal combat and that is going to help solve some of their problems to take these people out and put them in their regular bases. The Marines have rotated and the Airborne, too, this is a part of an orderly, regular process of rotating on the line.

PRESUS: I guess the Khe Sanh attack was pretty much built up in the newspapers? In terms of damage? Ans: There was no serious damage although 10 helicopters were hit with fragments, 8 still are opera-

tional and two of them can be repaired right away. There was no real significant damage although it was hit with a heavy attack but, as you know the mortar rockets are not very accurate at all and in some cases they simply prop them with sticks and get a pretty good feel for the angle and just lunge forward—like a shotgun—it is not very accurate.

PRESUS: Keep your eyes on the passes will you? *Ans*: Every day, sir.

PRESUS: I want to get a report on that weather. Once you get a “window” you will be able to go in in about two days? *Ans*: We are going to hit them the minute it opens up, the very instant.

PRESUS: That’s fine; that’s good.

153. Backchannel Message From the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Saigon, March 16, 1971, 1230Z.

566. I met with General Abrams for three and a half hours this afternoon and covered topics we programmed prior to my departure. We also covered in depth the plan MACV team is briefing to JCS and SecDef this week. As you know force level target of 60,000 as of 1 September 1972 contained in plan was dictated by SecDef. The plan was prepared by a select group of MACV staff on a most close hold basis. It has not had the benefit of the kind of scrubbing and refinement that more detailed staffing would have permitted. For this reason it should not be accepted as sufficiently tested to allow rigid application. For example, careful questioning of General Abrams and his J-3 confirmed that both would feel far more comfortable with target figure of 90,000 to 60,000 by September 1, 1972. For this reason I believe it is essential that you not allow President to become wedded to 60,000 figure. On the other hand, my discussions with General Abrams have convinced me that we have gone far enough now to make reductions to less than 100,000 by September 1972 an acceptable risk. I am also convinced that if certain minimum requirements are met this plan is workable and will not result in any serious unravelling here through period of our Presidential elections and well beyond. I will need more time here to

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 84, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. VI. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively, Eyes Only.

consider thoroughly all minimum requirements which will have to be met; however, two are quite evident:

1) TACAIR sortie levels must be kept at 10,000 per mos for FY 72 and 8000 per mos for FY 73. B52 sortie levels must be kept at 1000 per mos thru FY 73. These levels will reduce risks acceptable only if sortie levels for Laos remain at rates consistent with those required by Ambassador Godley prior to Lamson 719.

2) The US must be prepared to compensate with additional financial assistance for the drastic impact that US base closures and reduced US activity will have on SVN economy. Ambassador Bunker has described this as trading millions for billions.

General Abrams believes his plan will work and correctly makes the point that regardless of our rate of withdrawal, once our forces reach a certain level sometime after January 1, 1972, there is little point in quibbling about whether our level is 150,000 or 60,000. US ground forces will no longer have an impact on the conduct of the ground war. Therefore, from that point on, our force levels should be dictated by what is needed to continue to advise, to fill those areas of modernization shortfall needed by GVN forces such as intelligence, communications, some air cavalry capability and to accomplish the orderly out-loading of the tons of equipment and supplies which must be processed. Some local security is also called for but the large measure of security for US personnel will have to be provided by GVN forces because of dispersed geographic locations involved.

The drastic nature of this plan will require the most sensitive handling with Thieu and the South Vietnamese. Its premature surfacing here could have a disastrous effect on Thieu's election chances and whole stability of GVN—also, I believe its early surfacing at home could deprive President of major campaign coup. It should therefore be handled with utmost secrecy in Washington. The chances of leakage are high given past experience. Therefore I would urge you to caution Secretary Laird and the President of the absolute necessity of preventing its leaking until GVN can be appropriately brought aboard and until a game plan is devised to achieve maximum impact for President. Unfortunately handling will be complicated by need to give General Abrams approval to proceed with it not later than May 1. He must have this time to permit ports to handle out-loading in an orderly and responsible fashion. Reduced US strength will not permit any slippage beyond this date.

This plan and its drastic nature may lend itself to inclusion as key agenda item during July meeting of Presidents which I now believe should be held for a host of reasons.

Army forces in this plan will total between 50 and 60,000 by September 1, 1972. I believe Army should be asked now to study if a fig-

ure of this kind could be sustained on a volunteer basis. Chances appear good from here but General Abrams has declined to commit himself on this item.

I will have comments for you on situation in Laos and Cambodia tomorrow. In the interim I urge you to discuss Abrams plan with President, highlighting need for absolute security and need to stay flexible on 60,000 figure which is best thought of as a range of 90,000 to 60,000.

Best regards.

154. Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, March 16, 1971, 5:10–6:40 p.m.

SUBJECT

Intelligence on North Vietnamese Supply Movements

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	JCS
State	Lt. Gen. John W. Vogt
Mr. U. Alexis Johnson,	OMB
Ambassador William Sullivan	Mr. James Schlesinger
Mr. Ray Cline	NSC Staff
Defense	Col. Richard T. Kennedy
Mr. David Packard	Mr. John H. Holdridge
Col. Harold Belles	Mr. K. Wayne Smith
Lt. Gen. Donald V. Bennett	Mr. Keith Guthrie
Mr. Donald Linker	
CIA	
Mr. Richard Helms	
Mr. George Carver	
Mr. Paul Walsh	

SUMMARY

The WSAG received a briefing on the methodology employed in preparing intelligence estimates of supply movements along the Ho

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Nodis; COMINT. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House.

Chi Minh Trail. In the accompanying discussion, the WSAG considered the discrepancies between CIA and DIA estimates and the problems involved in comparing data from different years and in assessing the impact of the Lam Son operation on enemy supply throughput. It was agreed to hold a second WSAG meeting to discuss these topics further.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

155. Summary of Conclusions for a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, March 18, 1971, 5:05–6:07 p.m.

SUBJECT

Intelligence on North Vietnamese Supply Movements

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	JCS
State	Adm. Thomas H. Moorer
Mr. U. Alexis Johnson ²	Lt. Gen. John W. Vogt
Ambassador William Sullivan	OMB
Mr. Ray Cline	Mr. James Schlesinger
Defense	NSC Staff
Mr. David Packard	Col. Richard T. Kennedy
Lt. Gen. Donald Bennett	Mr. John H. Holdridge
Col. Harold Belles	Mr. Thomas K. Latimer
CIA	Mr. K. Wayne Smith
Mr. Richard Helms	Mr. Keith Guthrie
Mr. George Carver	
Mr. Paul Walsh	

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Nodis; COMINT. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. Smith informed Kissinger in a March 18 memorandum that the “intelligence community is obsessed with preparing for today’s WSAG and would not accomplish the analytical tasks we set out.” Smith assured Kissinger that the NSC staff and CIA analysts had devised a simple model to assess Lam Son’s effects but that the CIA believed it needed a White House order to gain DIA’s cooperation in doing the calculations. Smith wrote that the underlying problem was that CIA, unlike DIA, believed that the operation did not cut off all enemy supplies. (Ibid, Box H-80, WSAG Meeting File, Intelligence on NVSM 3–18–71)

² Not present at the beginning of the meeting. [Footnote in the original.]

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

The intelligence community will prepare by March 25 an assessment of North Vietnamese logistical performance during the 1970–71 dry season and of its impact on the range of military options open to the enemy during 1971 and 1972. The analysis should compare 1969–70 and 1970–71 performance, take into account additional requirements imposed on the enemy's overland logistical system during 1970–71, and estimate the increment in throughput to South Vietnam and Cambodia that would be required in 1970–71 for the enemy to continue a protracted warfare strategy or increase military activity above that level. Countervailing factors which increase enemy logistical capabilities (e.g., trail improvements) or decrease throughput requirements (e.g., withdrawal of troops from South Vietnam to Laos) should also be considered. In assessing relative performance in 1969–70 and 1970–71, percentage comparisons should be provided if it is not considered feasible to estimate tonnages.³

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

³ In a March 23 meeting with Congressmen Ford, Arends, and Anderson, Kissinger commented on the March 16 and 18 WSAG meetings: "You will see leaks all over town in the next few weeks on this issue, because the intelligence community is like a hysterical group of Talmudic scholars doing an exegesis of abstruse passages. If any of you are on an intelligence subcommittee, you might find this a good reason to cut the budget for the intelligence agencies. We had all the analysts at a meeting in the Situation Room, where they were debating tonnages and arguing over whether you can trust the sensors as opposed to COMINT. This bores the hell out of me—I want to know results, not tonnages." (Memorandum of conversation, March 24; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1025, Presidential/HAK Memcons, MemCon—Kissinger, Messrs MacGregor, Cook, et al., March 25, 1971)

156. **Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker)**¹

Washington, March 18, 1971, 1719Z.

WHS 1021. It would be hard to exaggerate the mystification and confusion caused here by the ARVN's latest scheme of maneuver which envisages a rapid pull-out from Laos.² For a week, we have been briefing on the assumption that we were proceeding along the lines of your latest conversation with President Thieu envisaging a slow pull-out through Base Area 611.

I do not want to get into details of military operations. However, it is intolerable to have the President vulnerable to constant changes of plans which are unilaterally implemented. The President will go on television on Monday night³ (protect). We must have an agreed strategy by then. From here, last week's scheme looked preferable. As you know, we originally approved Lam Son to disrupt supplies during the dry season. For this reason, careful consideration should be given to operations along Route 914 and through Base Area 611. But whatever the scheme we must be part of the planning and have adequate advance warning.

I hope Thieu understands that the President's confidence is an asset he should not lightly dissipate and that this may be his last crack at massive U.S. support.⁴

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 84, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. VI. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. In *Ending the Vietnam War*, pp. 203–204, Kissinger wrote that this backchannel message was in response to Bunker's March 12 message, Document 149.

² Kissinger apparently learned of this from CIA report CS 317/09016/71, which Helms sent to Kissinger under a March 18 covering memorandum. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1013, Haig Special File, Haig Trip File, Haig SEA Trip—Mar 71 [1 of 2])

³ The President's March 22 interview with Howard K. Smith was broadcast live on ABC radio and television. For text, see *Public Papers: Nixon, 1971*, pp. 448–465.

⁴ In a backchannel message to Bunker, March 19, Kissinger complained, "Because Thieu, et al, have not kept us fully informed of changes in their plans, we have had to follow the pack rather than lead it and have experienced difficult problems vis-à-vis a strident press and public here." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1013, Haig Special File, Haig SEA Trip—Mar 71 [1 of 2]) Kissinger also wrote in *Ending the Vietnam War* (p. 200) that he learned on March 18 that on February 12 Thieu issued orders to cancel Lam Son 719 once RVNAF casualties reached 3,000.

157. **Conversation Among President Nixon, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and the White House Chief of Staff (Haldeman)**¹

Washington, March 18, 1971.

Kissinger: We had another two-hour session on these—²

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —logistics, and it's a—it's a hopelessly complicated subject. I'm writing a memo for you to read over the weekend, without figures, just to—

Nixon: Well, I don't want to read any memos, because I'm going to be preparing for the [Howard K.] Smith thing next week—³

Kissinger: No, no, but I thought you might use it for the Smith thing—

Nixon: Oh. Oh, I see.

Kissinger: Not use figures, but show some of the factors why we are so confident that this has been a success. And now, I really am very confident, now that I've worked through these things.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: And I'm—

Nixon: Did Smith find out?

Kissinger: I've really gone through every figure on every road, and if you add—what I'm going to do is to come to—they were so delighted about many of the technical things. I made them analyze what is required to support last year's level of activity in Vietnam. I mean, what the total tonnage is. What tonnage they would have had to put in through Laos to make—to supply that, plus make up for Sihanoukville, minus what was consumed in Laos by the troops they had in Laos in terms of rice, in terms of ammunition expenditure, minus what we took out in these countries. And the figures don't have to be right, as long as the percentages are the same. And it now looks as if it is impossible for them, for this year, to start a dry season offensive on any projectional figures; impossible for them to have a 1st and 2nd Corps offensive this year; and, probably, not possible for them to do

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 469–13. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume. The conversation was part of a larger conversation that took place between 6:25 and 7:32 p.m.

² Not further identified.

³ See footnote 3, Document 156.

an offensive next year before April and May. And the details of these figures, I'll give them to you in time. But, we have had a lot of benefits that when—we hadn't really analyzed properly. For example, because of Cambodia, they've been expecting an attack into Laos ever since last year.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: So, they put in 50,000 troops where, last year, they had 7,000 troops. If you just add the rice consumption for 50,000 troops—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —you create a totally new consumption pattern, and no one had done this before.

Nixon: [Aside, possibly to operator] Well, I asked for Secretary Connally on the telephone, I said.

Kissinger: So, this has been—for example, one—one big [unclear], then, if you add the ammunition expenditure they've had for ten regiments in that area, it's another thing, a drain on their, on their supplies. I mean, even if we, even if we didn't stop a single truck as a result of the operation, these things had to go off the—had to go off the total figures. But then, when you put it all together, actually, your figure of 55 percent was wildly conservative. Up to now, they have gotten through only 80 percent of last year's, but there's still a lot in the pipeline, so it will go up beyond that. But, I'm really—

Nixon: What we really need, if you will [unclear] and I will not need you to dissect when I start studying this Sunday morning, but what we really need is precise things that I can say that are conservative and true. That's all.

Kissinger: Well, we can—

Nixon: I'll lay it out there and put it right on Howard—Howard Smith [unclear].

Kissinger: And we can make one hell of a summary also for you for April 7th.⁴

Nixon: Yes, sir.

Kissinger: We can really do it.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: I really must say, even—
[unclear exchange]

Nixon: [unclear] already?

Haldeman: Yeah.

⁴ On April 7, Nixon addressed the nation on the situation in Southeast Asia; see *Public Papers: Nixon, 1971*, pp. 522–527.

Kissinger: Even if it ends next week—

Nixon: Sure.

Kissinger: —some of this stuff, because when you add it, the figures of what it takes to feed 50,000 people in southern Laos, as compared to 8,000 last year, and—

Nixon: [unclear] Let me tell you, Henry, I have that feeling. There are other reasons. I—I just know that going in there and knocking the livin' bejeezus out of those in Laos [unclear]—

Kissinger: It scared them.

Nixon: And it scared 'em. And part of it—and it sent the international establishment into such a tizzy, and these people are deeply proud. The other thing—and I think your point is—these bastards, they've got to look at their hole card now. We'll find out. If they're going to negotiate, they're going to negotiate in the next three or four months.

Kissinger: That's right. Well, Walt Rostow was in today.⁵

Nixon: Oh, yeah.

Kissinger: Of course, he's often wrong, but he's—

Nixon: No, I—He's not really—

Kissinger: Actually, his judgments have been—

Haldeman: Pretty right.

Nixon: No. Hell, no! I—I agree with Rostow. He makes good speeches, everything.

Kissinger: Walt—

Nixon: He should have been in to come and say hello.

Kissinger: Well, Walt Rostow said—

Nixon: He knows we're doing the right thing, doesn't he? Huh?

Kissinger: Absolutely. He, he—

Nixon: Hmm?

Kissinger: He said something today—he said—and that really takes a lot for him—he said, "If we could have put your President together with our Cabinet, we would have really done something."

Nixon: [laughs] [unclear]

Kissinger: Yeah.

Haldeman: That's kind of interesting.

Nixon: Well—

Kissinger: This is an interesting—

⁵ President Lyndon B. Johnson's Assistant for National Security Affairs, April 1, 1966–January 20, 1969.

Nixon: Well, he had Rusk, of course, who is a tower of strength.

Kissinger: Yeah. And McNamara, in his way—

Nixon: He did what he was told.

Kissinger: What?

[unclear exchange]

Kissinger: McNamara would never have leaked.

Nixon: Never.

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: But what, what did Walt say?

Kissinger: Well, Walt says his gut feeling tells him they're getting ready to negotiate, and, to him, the Chou En-Lai visit to Hanoi—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —was the beginning of a political process rather than the opposite.

Haldeman: Hmm.

Kissinger: And, today, the Russians attacked China on the radio for being willing to sell out in Vietnam.

Nixon: [laughs] Sell out?

Kissinger: Yes.

Nixon: There is the problem, I think. I think the problem with both—the reason the Russians can't help us there is that they can't be timid, and they can't be accused of selling out. The reason the Chinese can—they can't be accused of it, so the hardliners in Hanoi—

Kissinger: Of course, the, the trouble for Hanoi is—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —that they've now fought for 10 years against us. They must've lost at least 700,000 men.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: They've had a whole young generation that are neither productive in North Vietnam, or, for that matter, even breeding.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: I bet their birthrate—I'm serious—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: —their birthrate must be way, way down.

Nixon: Why—good God, there's no men!

Kissinger: There are no men there.

Nixon: Yeah!

Kissinger: And, all it—if it ends now, they'll have very little to show for it. The fact that we can now run two big operations—at this moment there are five and a half North and South Vietnamese divi-

sions outside of the country, and they haven't been able to get a guerilla movement started. And that is—

Nixon: They haven't got one in Cambodia. Incidentally, what's happening in northern Laos?

Kissinger: Nothing.

Nixon: What the hell's the trouble there, though?

Kissinger: Well, we laid in some B-52 strikes a few weeks ago.

Nixon: Aren't we—but, but, you know—

Kissinger: They all told—

Nixon: —Helms told us five weeks ago, we're going to lose it again.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: Maybe we'll lose it next month?

Kissinger: We may lose it, but every month, week we gain brings that rainy season closer.

Nixon: When is their rainy season? Their's is early, isn't it?

Kissinger: It starts in the middle of June.

Nixon: Middle of June?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: May? Because it varies over there, doesn't it?

Kissinger: Yeah. And the—and in Cambodia, there are next to no incidents.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: Route 4 is open. You see when Route 4 was cut, it was reported every day. Now, unescorted convoys go from Sihanoukville to Phnom Penh every day. And there's no report in the newspapers—

Nixon: No—

Kissinger: —that there are no incidents.

Nixon: —good news is never reported.

Kissinger: So—

Nixon: It's all right. It comes out in the end, when we're done.

Kissinger: But, I must say, this analysis, I found very encouraging, because I, I didn't go in with that expectation, particularly. I didn't know what the—

Nixon: But, this analysis—they've got it, too, Henry. And they've got to look at their hole card. What the hell can they do?

Kissinger: They have only—they have two hopes, now. The one hope is that—

Nixon: Get Thieu out—

Kissinger:—that Thieu would collapse with the election in October. So, he may not be so wrong in playing it closely.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: And, the other one is our election. But our election, in my judgment, is a double-edged sword for him—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —for them, because if you get reelected—because you’ve demonstrated, from their point of view, unpredictability—and now, not having to be elected again—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —there’s just no telling what you’ll do.

Nixon: Yeah. So damn true.

Kissinger: That’s one problem. The second problem is: if we don’t give them a date before, and if you leave it in fairly good shape, and you should get defeated, would a Democrat dare to sell it out and take the opprobrium? So—

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: So, I’m not sure that the ’72 election is as clear a signal to them as the ’68 one was. In ’68, they thought if they would get rid of Johnson, they’d have it made.

Nixon: Hmm. They thought they’d get Humphrey.

Kissinger: And they thought they’d get Humphrey. But, in ’72, this isn’t so, so clear to them. And, if we get into a negotiation with them on a very private basis, this is a point—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —that should be made to them.

Nixon: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Kissinger: I actually think this summer, if we—if our domestic situation holds reasonably well, and we don’t give the deadline away, the deadline is our best bargaining chip—

Nixon: Sure it is. Well, maybe that little memorandum⁶ will help.

Kissinger: If we give it away November or December or October—if we—if we don’t get a negotiation by November—

⁶ In a March 18 memorandum to the Director of Central Intelligence and Secretaries of State and Defense, Nixon gave the following instructions regarding discussion of troop withdrawals: “(1) My comment at my March 4, 1971 press conference that our withdrawals will continue at the present rate referred specifically to the current increment. It is not to be construed in any way as a decision or directive applying to the entire withdrawal schedule. (2) In April I intend to make my decision as to the next increment of withdrawals. Until I announce that decision there should be no speculation either on or off the record on the size of the increment or the length of time it covers.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 115, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam Troop Withdrawals, Vietnam Troop Redeployment)

Nixon: We'll do it then.

Kissinger: Then doesn't make any difference—

Nixon: No, that's right.

Kissinger: Then we can do it—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: Then we should do it.

Nixon: What we should—we've got to, then. That's the time to give it away. Right after Thieu's election, we'll have a little meeting—assuming he gets elected—

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: —and announce the whole damn thing, and that's that. And the war is dead as an issue.

Kissinger: No problem.

Nixon: [snaps his fingers] Like that. Out! That's the time to do it.

Kissinger: But, if you do it now, you'll just get into the [unclear].

Nixon: Well, if you do it now, the main problem is right now, if you do it it's a little bit more important, you—there is still a chance that you could negotiate something. And, boy, that would be the best of all worlds—

Kissinger: [unclear]

Nixon: —to get it done. And I had chances. You know, I never thought it was very good, but there's some, now. There was none before. So, what the hell—?

Kissinger: And now, what—we wouldn't put to them the political proposition. Now, we would just negotiate military arrangements.

Nixon: Military arrangements. Mutual withdrawal.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: What about Cambodia and Laos?

Kissinger: Well, they'll have to stand-down there, too.

Nixon: Yeah. All right, well, if it's something—

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: —or, or, or the cease-fire, at least.

Kissinger: Yeah, we can do it in one of two ways. We can either not have mutual withdrawal, but just negotiate a cease-fire for our withdrawal and the prisoners, which would give everybody another year to gear themselves up without Communist attacks.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: And, since we're going to get out anyway in, in a year and a half, it doesn't make any difference whether we agree to get out in a year.

Nixon: Sure.

Kissinger: Once we are below 100,000 troops we have no combat effectiveness left—

Nixon: None—

Kissinger: —and—

Nixon: Well, the air.

Kissinger: The air. Yeah, but we could do a lot from Thailand and from carriers if they break the agreement.

Nixon: Oh, I see what you mean. Yeah. Okay.

158. Backchannel Message From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Saigon, March 19, 1971.

Visit to I Corps which included lengthy discussions with General Southerland as well as meetings with General Lam, CG, ARVN I Corps, and General Phu, CG, 1st ARVN Division, has been completed. Visit has confirmed that ARVN enthusiasm for continuation of Lam Son 719 is completely lacking. The extended periods of intense combat to which elements of ARVN airborne division and 1st Division have been subjected has left both commanders determined to call off operations as quickly as possible. General Lam is apparently succumbing to this pressure.

I arrived in I Corps after a period of especially bad weather during which elements of 1st ARVN regiment on high ground south of Route 9 have been under severe attack and with U.S. air having been only marginally effective. During this period the regiment's 4th battalion was badly mauled and eliminated as an effective fighting force. Results of this action culminated in decision by General Phu and General Lam to permit withdrawal from Laos of division's second regiment—the move to begin as soon as the first regiment had been withdrawn. Yesterday, 18 March, the entire first regiment was withdrawn and one battalion of the second regiment had also been displaced to South Vietnam. This action was taken despite assurances given to Gen-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 549, Vietnam Country Files, Laos, Vol. VII. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. The original is a retyped copy of backchannel message 640 from Saigon, 1310Z.

eral Southerland by General Lam that he would maintain the positions held by the second regiment on the high ground south of Route 9.

Lam has also ordered start of withdrawal of the airborne division to successive phase lines eastward toward border. It is now obvious that ARVN has lost its stomach for further operations in Laos and that main problem now faced by General Abrams is not getting ARVN to stay but rather to influence them to pull out in an orderly fashion.

The enemy now has five regiments poised to strike airborne on and north of Route 9 and seems to sense waning ARVN aggressiveness. Enemy has unquestionably suffered huge casualties, nevertheless smell of victory is in his nostrils and all-out effort on his part can be anticipated.

One of complicating factors in the situation has been the poor performance of the ARVN airborne division which has from the outset lacked aggressiveness. Its commander has continually complained of inadequate support from both General Lam and General Southerland.

Throughout this week General Abrams at the Saigon level and General Southerland at Corps level have been urging South Vietnamese to reinforce operation by moving second ARVN division North from its area of operations in Southern I Corps. General Lam and apparently President Thieu, have refused to do so. Last night President Thieu apparently called General Lam and informed him that he was moving the ARVN airborne back to Saigon as soon as it could be extracted from Laos. Despite above, General Lam still insists he will conduct Phase IV of Lam Son 719 by following up extraction and displacement of airborne and 1st division elements and armored forces along Route 9, with an attack overland due east by the two marine brigades through the Laotian salient but north of base area 611. He plans upon reaching the salient on or about 10 April, to subsequently attack back into Laos through base area 611 from its extremity. I personally have some doubts this will be done given current state of mind I have observed in ARVN leadership.

In my view, next week will be critical. ARVN leadership must be influenced to move eastward in orderly fashion utilizing preponderance of U.S. air power intelligently. This means each displacement must be undertaken only after full U.S. air assets have been concentrated to prepare moves. Further, General Lam must resist the CG, First ARVN Division's pressure to give up high ground south of Route 9 until airborne and armored forces have displaced east along Route 9. Weather will be the critical factor. My visit to I Corps has convinced me that issue now is not feasibility of reinforcing and remaining in Laos, but urgent need to impress upon ARVN the necessity of moving out only with full concentration of U.S. firepower in an orderly and tactically sound fashion. It appears to me that further pressure on ARVN risks not only rupturing of the kind of intimate coordination needed to in-

sure orderly displacement but also threatens severe fracture of U.S.-GVN relations at the political level. I regret I can not provide a more encouraging report but am confident this frank appraisal is essential for you to have. I have not discussed this appraisal with General Abrams and Ambassador Bunker but will do so this afternoon. In interim I recommend that pressure from Washington to reinforce or to delay departure from Laos be terminated. Efforts now should be concentrated on providing fullest U.S. support by way of firepower and in attempting to influence ARVN leadership to execute retrograde in an orderly and professional manner. Retrograde movement will certainly take more time than ARVN anticipates if it is done properly. Attack east by marines should take at least ten days or two weeks. Thus we can count on some ARVN activity in Laos up until early April. We may see Phase IV as described above but I have my doubts at this point.

General Abrams, Ambassador Bunker and I are to meet President Thieu this afternoon at which time the issue will be discussed. We will make an additional effort to bolster his resolve, however, the more limited success would be far preferable to the serious defeat of ARVN forces in Laos. These are the simple stakes at this point.

Review of situation during my visit confirms that ARVN interdiction of Route 914 has been only sporadic. Recent efforts to interdict road culminated in severe fighting which forced first ARVN division back up on to the high ground. ARVN forces are not now in a position to cut road. Thus enemy is strong along Route 914 and continues to mass around Aloui north of Route 9.

Best regards.

159. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, March 20, 1971.

SUBJECT

Lam Son

You will be asked for your assessment of the Lam Son operation.² Thus far the effects of Lam Son have been viewed in the overly simplistic terms of whether trucks are moving on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. We know trucks are moving, though at a substantially reduced rate south of operational areas. Lam Son was never intended to stop the movement of trucks.

What is fundamental to an assessment of Lam Son, however, is what the ultimate effectiveness of the movement of these trucks is in terms of the enemy's ability to continue or escalate the war in South Vietnam and Cambodia. If the trucks are supplying troops in South Laos, then they cannot be moving supplies to troops in South Vietnam or Cambodia.

On these grounds, there are some rather striking conclusions to be drawn about the effects of Lam Son.

We assume that at the beginning of this year enemy supplies were low and that his supply effort last year roughly approximates the logistics flow that will be required to support a protracted war in 1971.

But we know that in 1971 the enemy must meet a long list of *new* demands on his logistics system in addition to the output he achieved last year. These *new* demands must be met merely to sustain a protracted war in 1971.

The new demands are the supply increases necessary to compensate for:

- (1) the loss of Sihanoukville,

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 82, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam Operations in Laos and Cambodia, Vol. V. Top Secret. Sent for information. A stamped notation reads, "President has seen." According to a March 27 memorandum from Kennedy to Kissinger, the President requested that a summary of this memorandum be sent to Congressmen Boggs, Albert, and Ford. (Ibid., Box 314, Subject Files, Congressional Jan–Jul 1971, Vol. II [2 of 2]) Haig also sent a modified version to Klein under an April 15 covering memorandum authorizing him to share the information with columnist Jack Anderson. (Ibid., Box 154, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 9 Apr 71–30 Apr 71)

² Presumably at the March 22 interview; see footnote 3, Document 156.

—(2) new logistics demands for non-combat consumption to support the greatly enlarged force structure stationed in South Laos in fear of the kind of operation Lam Son has proved to be,

—(3) new demands for combat consumption by enemy troops defending the trail against Lam Son,

—(4) the tonnages of supplies in caches destroyed by Lam Son,

—(5) *increased* tonnage destroyed by bombing in the 1970–71 dry season versus the 1969–70 dry season.

The loss of Sihanoukville alone placed an enormous additional logistics burden on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. At least one-third and possibly one-half of the enemy's supply requirement for South Vietnam was met by shipments through Sihanoukville and purchases on the Cambodian economy.³

If the tonnages formerly shipped through Sihanoukville go down the Trail they must be multiplied by a factor of four to five to arrive at the total tonnage necessary to feed the additional logistics and combat troops in South Laos, to supply the POL for trucks, etc.

When all of these new requirements are added together—to offset Sihanoukville, direct consumption and destruction caused by Lam Son, etc.—they indicate that the enemy must increase his trail *input* effort by at least 50% this year merely to come out where he did last year. His trail output must be about one-third more than last year's.

Yet, to date we are reasonably confident that output from the trail into South Vietnam and Cambodia is only one-third last year's output.

It is too early to say what the final results will be, but we do know that:

—*Even a record enemy logistics effort through the rest of the dry season, starting today, is likely to leave the enemy significantly short of the supplies he needs in 1971 to conduct a protracted war effort.* This means major offensives of country-wide impact are unlikely. It means the Vietnamese government will have the opportunity in 1971 to continue to achieve pacification gains against a low level of enemy activity.⁴

—*Supplies will arrive too late for offensive activity in the 1971 dry season, the usual time of enemy highpoint activity.* Thus far in 1971 enemy activity in Cambodia and South Vietnam has fallen below that of similar periods in past years.

—*The enemy will have fewer options in 1972.* Because it takes several months of the dry season to attain a logistics *outflow* rate to Cambodia and South Vietnam, the failure of the enemy to build up large stock-

³ Nixon underlined the first half of this sentence.

⁴ Nixon underlined this sentence and wrote, "Sporadic attacks," in the left margin.

piles in 1971 will mean that it will be late in the dry season (the dry season ends about May 15) or into the wet season in 1972 before his logistics capabilities would permit him to launch a major offensive. This, of course, assumes the enemy can successfully solve the logistics problems in 1972 he was unable to solve in 1971.

—*Local supply shortages minimize possibility of major offensives this year in MR 2 and MR 1 except across the DMZ where the enemy is not logistically constrained.* Lam Son would appear to have preempted an MR 1 or MR 2 offensive this dry season by preventing the enemy from establishing forward-based stocks in northern South Vietnam and the adjoining Laos border areas.

While the logistics benefits to Lam Son are very important, another key result of the operation was that it made credible the threat Hanoi has maintained up to 30,000 combat forces in South Laos in 1970 to meet. Hanoi *must* maintain large forces in South Laos to protect its logistics corridor as long as friendly forces pose a credible threat to the Trail.

Thus, a key long range benefit to Lam Son is that the enemy will feel some compulsion to continue to maintain large combat forces in South Laos.⁵ Therefore, these forces (a portion of which were formerly in South Vietnam) cannot be used to threaten Vietnamization in South Vietnam.

A near term benefit to Lam Son is that enemy units destined to conduct offensive activity in Cambodia and the highlands of South Vietnam have been held up to cope with ARVN. A possible four enemy regiments have been put out of combat commission by Lam Son. These results complement the logistics benefits to Lam Son in making it unlikely that the enemy will mount major offensive activities in MRs 1 or 2 of South Vietnam and in Cambodia, despite evidence that the enemy planned to mount such offensives.

The assumptions and calculations underlying the estimates in this memorandum are at Tab A.⁶

⁵ Nixon highlighted this sentence.

⁶ Attached but not printed is an undated paper entitled "Assumptions and Quantitative Estimate for Assessing the Effects of Lam Son."

160. **Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between Secretary of Defense Laird and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)**¹

Washington, March 21, 1971.

K: Mel, how are you?

L: Very good; how are you?

K: Okay.

L: Say, I've gone over these logs here on the telephone calls, and so forth. Evidently, the President must have been a little exercised, huh?

K: Oh; yeah. I mean, what calls—to Moorer?

L: Yeah.

K: Well, we didn't have much advance warning of these withdrawals.

L: Yeah.

K: And, with him going on television, he just wanted to be sure that he knew what the facts were, and then when all these stories hit with panic there, he just wanted to find out for himself; or are you talking about my conversations with Moorer?

L: Well, I got a list of all of them here. I thought, Jesus, things must have really gone to hell around here.

K: No, no; look, what happens is the President will call me four or five times and repeat essentially the same order. Then I call Moorer and say, you know, this is what the President wants to know. And you weren't available, but . . .

L: Just so we keep on the right track because I think it almost got off the track on Abrams going out on a . . . just going over these briefs on the messages and conversations, it looks like Abrams damn near went off and had a public press conference,² and I don't think we want to start him on public press conferences. He handled that thing right.

K: Well, that was initially a Presidential order, and then I changed it to a backgrounder when I realized that.

L: Yeah, but on things like that, let me know about those things . . .

K: Well, I let Packard know.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 9, Chronological File. No classification marking. There is no indication on the original what time the call was placed. Transcribed on March 22.

² General Abrams gave a background briefing for the press on Lam Son on March 21 in Saigon. A full text of the question and answer session with Abrams following his briefing is *ibid.*, NSC Files, Box 82, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam Operations in Laos and Cambodia, Vol. V. Kissinger summarized the briefing in a memorandum to Nixon, March 21, which is *ibid.*

L: Yeah, we can save some problems there on things like that because that almost got off the . . . You know, I think that . . . well, of course, what you have here, is you've got Thieu trying to run the thing down in Saigon, and he's looking at his political problems, you know; and he's concerned about the election coming up. I believe he probably will announce a reduction in his forces within four months, and he's going to do that for political purposes, too, because you know he brought that up to me, and I asked him not to do it.³ In my memorandum of conversation . . .

K: Yeah, I remember it very well. You said this would be very damaging and I think you are right.

L: And he also is . . . when he talked at that time was always wanted to limit his operations from five to eight weeks. You remember . . .

K: No, no; you told me.

L: And he is staying according to his plan—and it may be not Binh's plan—but he is staying according to his plan.

K: No, Mel, the trouble was, as I reconstruct it, if these guys had told us, or if we had understood as well as you understood, that he meant to get out after eight weeks—five to eight weeks—and you never had any doubt about it. I have to say this to you.

L: And I tried to get that in the order because I didn't want to mislead the President or anybody. You remember me fighting that rule?

K: I remember it very well, but if we had understood this, then after the fall of Tchepone, we could have sort of announced that they were getting out or this sort of achieves our objective. For example, Bill had to go on television on Thursday⁴—on Tuesday—we could have positioned him to carry the ball on that a little bit. Instead, as late as Wednesday afternoon, I was told that Phase V of the operation wouldn't start till April 15th. And then the very next day, we are told they are getting out over the weekend. And this is what got the President so concerned whether there was a rout here.

L: Well, it's probably my fault because I didn't insist upon getting that through.

K: That was his problem.

L: Coming out, they are having heavy fighting there today, and the strikes are going along pretty well.

K: Well, he's going on television, you know, tomorrow night with Howard K. Smith, and he wanted to make sure he wasn't out in left

³ See Document 105.

⁴ March 18.

field. On the whole, he thinks—and I think, and I believe you agree—that the operation has been a considerable success.

L: Oh, yeah.

K: Don't you think?

L: Right; it has been a success and we'll know fully how successful it is in September and October.

K: Exactly.

L: And that's where we have to stay, and I think it's going to show up as a greater success than we could even imagine now.

K: Well, that's what I think. Now, what the President wants . . . I was waiting for you to come back, Mel. I knew you were coming back at 1:30 this afternoon, and I didn't want to bug you out there because you couldn't do anything about it. There weren't any operational orders given. This was all stuff where the President said, "Are they panicking?" I'd say, "I don't know; I'll check with Moorer." You know, it was that sort of question.

L: I just want you to know that, hell, we'll do everything we can, Henry; and I think the thing is going to prove out to be a very successful operation. Now, when you withdraw and you are in contact withdrawing, it's a hell of a problem.

K: Mel, what the President would appreciate is if you and Moorer would go and brief some Senators and lay that on on Tuesday,⁵ in terms of an evaluation of the operation; what you think it did . . .

L: We will briefing the Appropriations Committee tomorrow, too. As you know, Moorer and I are there all day tomorrow.

K: Right, but if you could broaden it beyond that on Tuesday.

L: We'll do that.

K: And, you know, not just . . . I think the CIA is really screwing us.

L: Well, on their evaluations, they are, you see, because they leave us . . . they really are not helpful right now at times.

K: And you know that—Dave must have told you—we went through all these DIA figures and I must say they are pretty impressive to me.

L: Well, now, you know DIA is coming along a lot better than people give it credit. This Bennett is a good man, and that's been reorganized and it's a good operation now.

K: And CIA doesn't have any figures to contradict it. All they have is moaning and groaning.

⁵ March 23.

L: Sure.

K: And being negative. And if you consider that they had to supply 40,000 people in southern Laos, that they had to consume rice, that they lost the rice that they purchased in Cambodia, that they lost the port of Sihanoukville, that the gunships have improved, and that they had to supply this operation logistically—just forget about the roads being cut—it must have cut into their system don't you think?

L: Oh, sure; it's cut into the system considerably, and it's really raised hell with some of their units. Now, if you'll notice, there's not an awful lot of AA fire going on over there today.

K: Yeah, I noticed that.

L: And that's simply because they've had to be doing so much moving around there.

K: Well, the President has given them one more strike, and then we'll call it off. If the weather holds up . . .

L: Yeah, well, the weather looks good, so it'll be "go" for another 24 hours.

K: Good. Mel, and you will then, whenever it's finished, announce from the Pentagon or from Saigon—wherever you think it's better—as you did in May that it's now terminated.

L: Right, Henry; we will.

K: I don't know whether you've met this fellow—that Colonel who commanded some of the helicopter operations, and the President wondered whether, when you brief the Senators on Tuesday or the Congress on Tuesday, if you thought it a good idea if he could answer a few questions.

L: I think that's a good idea.

K: Good.

L: Yeah, that's a good idea.

K: Hold on a second. Mel, it's the President calling me. I'll call you back.

L: Okay. Keep him cool.

K: I'll keep him cool. You can count on that.

161. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, March 22, 1971.

SUBJECT

Assessment by General Abrams

Attached at Tab A² is a message from General Abrams assessing the effects of the Laotian and Cambodian operations. The following are excerpts from key paragraphs which comment on progress in Vietnamization, impact on U.S. forces, collateral benefits, effect on enemy capabilities and effect on enemy logistics of the Laos operation. (The full text of these paragraphs is indicated at the tabs.)

Progress in Vietnamization

—The operation has been a significant test. The South Vietnamese operated without U.S. advisors, without the reassuring presence of adjacent U.S. units which could render assistance if needed, and they did so concurrently with a major operation in Cambodia in addition to continuing operations in their own country.

—The South Vietnamese have mounted a complex multi-division operation in conditions of difficult unfamiliar terrain, adverse weather and against a well prepared and determined foe.

—RVNAF forces acquitted themselves well militarily, achieved the objectives they set for themselves and did so in the face of the most determined opposition.

—Success has not been without cost. Some units will require a period of refitting before becoming fully combat effective again and there are indications of reduced morale and self-confidence on the part of some units which suffered heavy losses without achieving significant results.

—Highly encouraging, however, and a strong indication of continuing progress toward the goal of Vietnamization is the planning currently being accomplished toward further operations in Laos as a continuation of Lam Son 719.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 153, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, 11 February–28 March 1971. Secret. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² Attached but not printed is message 220325Z from Abrams to McCain and Moorer, March 22.

Impact on U.S. Forces

—Although expensive in terms of U.S. support costs, achievements indicate that in the long run the Laotian operation has been highly productive.

—Lam Son 719 has certainly achieved its primary objective of carrying the fight to the enemy's sanctuary and disrupting his principal lines of communications. This success will buy the South Vietnamese additional time in which to continue strengthening their armed forces while permitting withdrawal of U.S. combat troops as planned.

Collateral Benefits

—The operation has demonstrated the capability of conducting air mobile operations in areas where there are large numbers of anti-aircraft weapons. Aircraft losses have been about 1 helicopter per 2,400 sorties. The weather has been generally adverse, the terrain inhospitable and yet large scale air mobile operations have been successfully conducted.

Effects Upon Enemy Logistical Capabilities

—Although it will take some time for a full assessment, considerable disruption has occurred. Interdiction of routes caused the enemy to shift to less desirable alternate routes and to relocate at least one supply transshipment center.

—The loss of an estimated 3,500 experienced rear service personnel will have a deleterious effect on the efficiency of the logistical system.

—Most of the input into the logistic system since the beginning of the Lam Son operation is believed to have been in direct support of the battle. This fact, coupled with an approximate 75% reduction in throughput to South Vietnam and Cambodia when compared to last year's estimate, leads to the conclusion of a further and accelerated degradation of enemy capability against South Vietnam and Cambodia.

—The increased requirements of consumption due to the Laotian operation, greatly increased lines of communication security forces, and ground/air interdiction are probably collectively responsible for the throughput reduction. The lost throughput volume will result in a further dampening effect on the enemy capability in both South Vietnam and Cambodia.

Effects on Enemy Capability

—The enemy withdrawal of a division from Military Region I will probably have an accelerating effect on the progress of community defense and local development efforts.

—The operation probably disrupted plans for returning two regiments of one division to South Vietnam and necessitated the diver-

sion of another regiment which was bound for Military Region I. Although these units can be brought back up to strength, an extensive delay can be anticipated.

—The enemy's commitment of his strategic reserves in North Vietnam has further reduced capability to institute major future actions against South Vietnam.

—One regiment destined for the COSVN area was also diverted.

In concluding his report, General Abrams makes the following summary comments about the two operations:

While significantly different in concept, execution and results, there are many similarities between Lam Son and Toan Thang. They are both multi-division operations, conducted without accompanying U.S. advisors, executing complex plans and, in the main, achieving their goals. There have been disappointments and failures in each as well as successes. However, on an overview, both operations have gone well militarily and the maximum practical benefits have been realized. The fact that the RVNAF were able to mount two such operations simultaneously speaks for the success of the Vietnamization program. Also, the willingness of the ARVN to conduct cross border operations reflects a dramatic change from the thinking which previously left the initiative entirely to the enemy.³ These operations have undoubtedly bought more time for both the RVN and GKR to strengthen their internal security.

Some statistics on enemy losses in Laos which have been extracted from the message are at Tab B.⁴

³ Nixon underlined this sentence and wrote in the margin: "K—get out to press."

⁴ Attached but not printed is a list that includes the following statistics: 13 of 33 PAVN battalions rendered ineffective; 55 tank kills; food destroyed that would feed 172 PAVN battalions for a month; captured weapons equivalent to equip 13 battalions; 1.5 million pounds of ammunition destroyed; 1,362 destroyed trucks and 419 damaged; 90,000 gallons of petroleum in barrels; and the interdiction of a pipeline that reduced the PAVN capability to move supplies.

162. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, March 22, 1971.

SUBJECT

Implications of the Laos Operation for South and North Vietnam and for the U.S.

This memorandum estimates the implications of the Lam Son operation for South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and the United States.

The following represents our current judgments, which are necessarily preliminary.

Implications for South Vietnam. The implications for South Vietnam will be mixed, with some potential military benefits and some potential political disturbances.

—The amount of munitions destroyed and delayed in the operation will seriously crimp enemy plans this dry season and perhaps over the entire year. Hanoi's capacity to interfere in the South Vietnamese elections, except through sporadic showpiece efforts, will be very sharply limited.

—The effects of the operation on Hanoi's military plans will be particularly severe because of the loss of other Communist sources of supply in the south and the loss of the Cambodian sanctuaries. Hanoi would have to send about one and a half times as many supplies through the pipeline this year than last just to keep even. As a result of this operation, it is now virtually certain that Hanoi cannot even match last year's total. General Abrams reported this morning a 75 percent reduction in throughput of supplies to Cambodia and South Vietnam when compared to last year's estimate.² We are already getting reports of severe Communist supply shortages in Military Regions 3 and 4 to the South.

—We know that a number of enemy units have been very badly hurt, and have suffered heavy casualties. Those units would probably have been used against I Corps within the next few months, which cannot now be done. Thus, on balance, even though the ARVN has also suffered heavy casualties, our judgment is that the North Vietnamese cannot follow up in time to take advantage of it. It appears that the ca-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 549, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. VII. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² See Document 161.

sualty figures against North Vietnamese forces may have in fact been greater than we have heard. We conducted over 500 B-52 raids; we attained damage assessments on only 10 percent of these. In virtually every case, the assessments showed the raids had been massively effective in destroying staging areas and achieving casualties. Thus North Vietnamese losses may range much higher above 10,000 than we now believe.

—It is also clear that the North Vietnamese, like the South Vietnamese, were taking losses in their elite units rather than the lower rated units.

—We cannot yet tell whether the pace of Vietnamization would have to be slowed, but right now I doubt it. In any case, we will want to review the ARVN performance carefully in order to see what changes, if any, we should make in our Vietnamization program.

—Thieu may be hurt politically for having launched a venture which was not a full success. This could make him vulnerable in the upcoming election. Minh and (particularly) Ky appear to be maneuvering to profit from this.

—Thieu may be less willing than before to proclaim a new political initiative, since he will not be leading from unquestionable strength.

North Vietnam. In Hanoi the reactions will probably also be mixed, with some relief that the operation ended as it did but some concern over what it demonstrates about South Vietnamese readiness to carry the battle into vital areas.

—It is clear that Hanoi, from the moment that the battle began, was intensely alert to all its implications and treated it as an engagement of the utmost importance. In fact, the North Vietnamese concentrated more of their resources and showed a higher readiness to sacrifice lives and material than the South Vietnamese.

—Given the Politburo's predilection to continue on its chosen course, it is probable that Hanoi will now be reluctant to make any new negotiating proposals until the end of this year or at least until all the political results of the operation are in.

—But Hanoi's ultimate attitude must be tempered with concern about the number of men it has lost. Hanoi also knows the real cost of the operation to them and cannot key its future plans solely on U.S. press reporting.

—Moreover, Hanoi's capacity to inflict significant military damage in South Vietnam has been severely reduced. And Hanoi will probably have to be prepared for further South Vietnamese incursions. ARVN operations in Cambodia have shown that the South Vietnamese

are prepared to come back into enemy supply and base areas again and again.

—Hanoi may be forced to try to keep the supply trails open as long as possible and perhaps even during the rainy season, which would be a costly and not very remunerative operation.

—It is also possible that Hanoi's relations with China were strained as a consequence of this operation. Although the Chinese came in with a number of helpful words and gestures, there are indications that Peking's performance fell short of Hanoi's fondest hopes for binding Peking commitments.

—Something we should bear in mind, although it does not relate directly to the consequences of the operation, is the reluctance the North Vietnamese have shown about crossing the DMZ in force, even though they may have been tempted at times. This probably reflects Hanoi's fears that we are just looking for an excuse to resume bombing. It may also reflect its concern that the ARVN, and perhaps we, might have followed retreating NVA units right into North Vietnam.

The United States. Here, particularly because of the very one-sided press treatment of the operation, the consequences of the operation were probably most adverse. Laos has again brought the war to the front pages, in a way which shows that no early and easy end is in sight. Opponents of Vietnamization will probably be encouraged to push harder for a unilateral U.S. withdrawal. However, these problems may be overcome over time if it can be shown that, as a result of this operation, our casualties have declined even lower and that the rate of enemy attacks has been materially affected.

163. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

Covert Action Campaign on Lam Son 719

Attached is a memorandum from CIA Director Helms² outlining actions which he has taken in capitals abroad and in the intensification of black broadcasts aimed at domestic audiences in the DRV and at NVA troops in the field. Such a program has, of course, been underway but will be intensified immediately stressing the following points:

—The closing of Sihanoukville dictated an unprecedented reliance on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Concurrently, the improvement in ARVN forces enabled them to carry out an ambitious operation against the Trail network.

—Lam Son 719 was originally conceived as limited in time and space and the operation adhered closely to the original schedule.

—South Vietnamese mobile tactics employing air support and air mobility were specifically tailored to overcome North Vietnamese local advantages and numerical superiority. These tactics forced the North Vietnamese to mass, giving Allies the opportunity to inflict maximum damage and then withdraw ARVN forces.

—Overall ARVN performance was quite impressive and resulted in heavy damage to numerically superior NVA forces.

—In a larger sense the initiative has now been achieved by the ARVN.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 85, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, 20 March 71. Secret; Sensitive.

² Attached but not printed is a March 22 memorandum from Helms to Kissinger on "Covert Action Campaign on Lam Son 719 Operation." According to a transcript of a telephone conversation between Kissinger and Helms at 10:45 a.m., March 22, Nixon had sought assurance "that something is being done on the black propaganda." Helms informed Kissinger that he would furnish a report that CIA had been working on "all weekend" by the end of the day. (Ibid., Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 9, Chronological File)

164. Minutes of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, March 23, 1971, 3:06–4:30 p.m.

SUBJECT

Evaluation of Lam Son Operation

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	JCS
State	Admiral Thomas H. Moorer
Mr. U. Alexis Johnson	Lt. Gen. John W. Vogt
Mr. William Sullivan	OMB
Defense	Mr. James Schlesinger
Mr. David Packard	NSC Staff
Mr. Dennis J. Doolin	General Alexander Haig
Lt. Gen. Donald Bennett	Col. Richard T. Kennedy
CIA	Mr. John H. Holdridge
Lt. Gen. Robert E. Cushman	Mr. Wayne Smith
Mr. George Carver	Mr. Keith Guthrie

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

The WSAG discussed the impact of the Lam Son operation on the North and South Vietnamese armed forces and on the political situation in South Vietnam. It was agreed that:

1) the effect of Lam Son on the enemy logistical system and on enemy military capabilities in 1971–72 would be discussed at a WSAG meeting on March 25.

2) themes to be used in public information treatment of Lam Son would be discussed at the same meeting.

3) the Defense Department would obtain photographs illustrating enemy supply losses caused by Lam Son.

4) the Defense Department would provide information to answer inquiries generated by a CBS television interview with an American

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Nodis. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. All brackets except those that indicate the omission of unrelated material are in the original. In a March 23 briefing memorandum to Kissinger, Kennedy and Holdridge noted that the purpose of the meeting was to make a preliminary assessment of Lam Son 719, but that the participants would not be informed of this until the morning of the meeting to ensure that they “will not be armed with arguments or pre-cooked factual base.” (Ibid., Box H-80, WSAG Meetings, Evaluation of Lam Son Operation 3–23–71)

sergeant, who complained of inadequate support for his 175 mm. artillery unit operating near Khe Sanh.

[Omitted here are reports of the military situation of the Lam Son operation.]

Gen. Vogt: The ARVN could have gotten more supplies if they had been able to move along Route 914. They did seize more crew-served weapons than were taken in the whole Cambodian operation. All of these things will offset the negative effects of the operation on the ARVN.

One thing worth pointing out is that just seeing that the enemy is willing to take such heavy losses will have a sobering effect on the ARVN.

Dr. Kissinger: Sobering is the right word to describe the situation in view of those reports about North Vietnamese dead with rice wine in their canteens.

Admiral Moorer: They often get their people tanked up, especially the sappers.

Gen. Vogt: Lam Son has thrown the enemy timetable off. We were counting on an attack in I Corps that didn't materialize. Lam Son probably pre-empted it.

As for the Toan Thang operation, it bought a lot of time for the Cambodian Government, which is now able to conduct operations north of Phnom Penh.

Dr. Kissinger: With General Tri's death, are the units in Toan Thang fighting with determination?

Gen. Vogt: There has been only one good operation.

Admiral Moorer: Some changes in leadership are needed.

Gen. Vogt: Tri's loss has been severely felt.

Admiral Moorer: There are political problems with removing one of the division commanders.

Gen. Vogt: The ARVN will be cheered by the fact that much of the ammunition destined for the south will never get there.

The factor that will have the most impact in both North and South Vietnam is the very very heavy losses the enemy suffered. I think our estimates are conservative. I think the ARVN have not made excessive claims; on occasion, we have counted more bodies than they reported. Furthermore, we have only been in a small percentage of the areas that were hit by bombing. In those areas that the ARVN did reach, the body count was heavy.

Mr. Johnson: Have you done a balance sheet showing the enemy strength when we went in and the losses they suffered? Accepting the fact that they suffered heavy losses, how were they able to show such strength?

Gen. Vogt: They had to divert infiltrators bound for the south. They can't replace the leaders lost as a result of Lam Son.

Dr. Kissinger: Did we know about the tanks ahead of time, including how many there were?

Gen. Bennett: Yes.

Gen. Vogt: We saw them moving down through the Panhandle.

The meatgrinder effect of Lam Son may be its most decisive result. The enemy took terrific losses in order to gain a psychological victory.

Admiral Moorer: About the tanks, we knew there were some there but not how many.

Mr. Johnson: Accepting all of what you have said [about the meatgrinder effect], the North Vietnamese still had a hell of a lot of fight in them.

Gen. Vogt: Yes, but their tactics were suicidal. In one area alone we found 400 killed by B-52s.

They used human wave tactics like the Chinese in Korea. Their troops are completely indoctrinated. In other operations we have even found gunners chained to their guns.

Another plus of Lam Son is that the ARVN fought the best North Vietnamese units on what could be considered their home ground and unit for unit did a good job. Later on this will have a great effect on morale. They also learned a lot from the operation that they can use later.

Dr. Kissinger: Are you thinking they would go into Laos again?

Gen. Vogt: Yes, possibly. The staffs also learned a great deal from the operation.

Admiral Moorer: Initially they didn't make adequate arrangements for fire coordination.

Gen. Vogt: The ARVN has unsettled the enemy with the knowledge that they can undertake this sort of operation, that South Laos is not inviolate. The enemy tank destruction was significant. It amounted to one-fourth to one-third of his total inventory. Some of those destroyed were T-54s, the best they had. The tac air stopped the tanks effectively.

Mr. Packard: They weren't always able to destroy them.

Gen. Vogt: But they stopped them, and they were then destroyed by other means. Tac air, helicopters, and heavy weapons worked as a team.

The South Vietnamese know that the North Vietnamese committed a heavy proportion of their strategic reserves. This is a net gain for South Vietnam. Lam Son disrupted enemy plans to introduce additional forces into Cambodia and South Vietnam. This will have an effect on the in-country situation. We have already seen that in certain

areas the regional and provincial forces have come alive and inflicted heavy losses.

Mr. Sullivan: In I Corps the removal of the 1st and 2nd Divisions resulted in a 5% decline in HES statistics in February. The percentage will probably be the same for March. Thus, pacification has suffered.

Gen. Vogt: But the number of enemy being killed by the regional and provincial forces is at an all-time high. This is a big plus, because it indicates a lowered level of enemy activity. I think this has proved the validity of Vietnamization.

Dr. Kissinger: That is a good presentation. We will have to turn you loose on Senator McGovern² next.

Gen. Bennett: With regard to enemy tanks, we knew the North Vietnamese had about 230 in North Vietnam. We had some isolated pictures of tanks. However, the numbers which the enemy had [in the Lam Son area] exceeded what we had expected.

The North Vietnamese forces in the Lam Son area have lost 12,000 killed, of whom 6,000 were in combat units.

Dr. Kissinger: You don't believe that figure is low?

Gen. Bennett: No. I accept that it is on the low side. The losses were primarily in the 304th and 308th divisions. The enemy has received some replacements, perhaps about 7,000. These are infiltrators that have been siphoned off.

The enemy has two options. He can continue along Route 9 toward Khe Sanh and launch an attack eastward in conjunction with the six regiments in the DMZ. The second option for the North Vietnamese would be to stay where they are and to continue attacks by fire. Their artillery is within range of Khe Sanh. I think the second option is more likely.

Dr. Kissinger: But if they have lost eight out of twelve regiments, how is it realistically possible that they could continue an attack along Route 9 against both US and South Vietnamese forces?

Gen. Bennett: That is why I consider this is not likely to happen. They need to rebuild their leadership cadres.

Dr. Kissinger: How long will the rebuilding take?

Gen. Bennett: Three or four months.

Dr. Kissinger: Then they could start another attack in August.

Gen. Bennett: That would be after the beginning of the rainy season. I don't think they will continue the attack, but they can maintain contact. They have a problem in that on the other side of the South Vietnamese border there is no good road net.

² Senator George S. McGovern (D-MT) was a noted critic of the war in Vietnam.

Let's look at what is happening elsewhere. In the highlands of MR 2 three regiments are concentrating near Ban Hep. This operation is independent of what they are doing near Khe Sanh. In the rest of Vietnam, they can stage high points of limited duration, but they don't have the capability for continued operations.

Dr. Kissinger: Did Lam Son affect their ability to carry out the Ban Hep operation?

Gen. Bennett: Yes, because they haven't been able to make maximum use of the dry season to shove supplies down the trail. Another problem for them in mounting an attack on Khe Sanh is that it would drain supplies bound for other areas, particularly South Vietnam and Cambodia.

Dr. Kissinger: We will have a session Thursday afternoon to go over the logistical situation.

Mr. Sullivan: Can we handle an enemy attack on Khe Sanh?

Gen. Bennett: If they choose the first option, we will have enough forces, assuming air support is still available.

Mr. Johnson: With US troops in Khe Sanh, they could raise our casualties by attacking. This would be a good psychological/political option.

Gen. Bennett: They have moved mortars and artillery into position. We will be getting heavy fire attacks along Route 9.

Admiral Moorer: They will be deterred by the thought of what we could do.

Dr. Kissinger: What could we do?

Admiral Moorer: We could resume the bombing up north. We could bring in the other two brigades of the 101st Airborne. They can't assume we will just sit there if they try a full-scale attack.

Gen. Vogt: In the area from the DMZ to just south of Route 9 there are 15,000 RVNAF and 17,000 US troops. In the tier below, which extends to Da Nang, we have another 8,000 U.S. troops.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Gen. Bennett) In your personal judgement, are we from a strictly military standpoint better off in terms of the combat situation in I Corps?

Gen. Bennett: We are better off. There are both tangible and intangible reasons. Of the tangible reasons, the first is the disorganization caused in the orderly flow of enemy supplies.

Dr. Kissinger: That makes no difference in I Corps.

Gen. Bennett: So far it doesn't.

Gen. Vogt: We are now stronger in I Corps than we have been for some months.

Dr. Kissinger: Since our units are going to be reduced, are we better or worse off given the losses suffered by both the South and the North Vietnamese.

Mr. Packard: We are much better off. Their supplies can't move. Their relative strength is less.

Gen. Bennett: There has been a tremendous impact in terms of the number of units in North Vietnam that they have had to bring down to Laos as a result of Lam Son.

Dr. Kissinger: How would you handle the argument that if there had been no attack on Tchepone, the North Vietnamese would never have moved those units? Just being the devil's advocate, I wonder if we can suppose that they would have used two home reserve units just for an attack on I Corps.

Gen. Bennett: I doubt it.

Admiral Moorer: Even so, from the standpoint of their overall situation, they will have to restore and supply these divisions. This has an impact on their whole position. They are fighting in five different places now.

Dr. Kissinger: Does everybody agree with the net assessment of the tactical situation that we are better off after Lam Son than we were before?

Mr. Doolin: Doesn't this really depend more on how people look at the situation [than on what actually happened]?

Admiral Moorer: We are talking about this from the purely military standpoint, not the political.

Mr. Schlesinger: Considering the stakes—military, political, and symbolic—the President has in this operation, it would be a good idea to put out a white paper on it.

Dr. Kissinger: When one considers the success we have had with white papers!

Gen. Bennett: Nothing has been found in the Toan Thang area, possibly because there is nothing there to find.

Dr. Kissinger: Since Tri's death, it seems that where the ARVN is, the enemy isn't. Up near Snoul the ARVN ran into the enemy by mistake; they made a fast retrograde movement.

Gen. Bennett: The enemy won't attack unless they can make a good fight.

Dr. Kissinger: Either there is nothing in that area, or the ARVN does not want to go into an area where caches might be. They go about in circles in areas where we know there are neither enemy forces nor caches. They are letting the enemy get out of the way.

Mr. Packard: The problem is leadership.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Gen. Bennett) You think that there may be no caches there?

Mr. Carver: COMINT indicates there is a big supply area near Kratie. The enemy is trying to keep the ARVN out of that region by harassing them around Chup.

Mr. Sullivan: Why not go into Chup? One enemy unit got resupplied there.

Gen. Vogt: The ARVN has been in the area.

Mr. Sullivan: They have been in parts of it. But why don't they go right through it?

Gen. Vogt: We know the ARVN is not being aggressive. General Abrams has told President Thieu about this. They are in the process of changing division commanders.

Gen. Bennett: One anomaly is that the fire attack rate is going up in MR 4. We don't know how they are getting supplies. One theory is that the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong are at the point where they feel that because of stepped-up South Vietnamese activity they will lose their ammunition if they don't use it.

Dr. Kissinger: When the North Vietnamese see the ARVN moving as it does in Cambodia, won't their confidence increase?

Gen. Vogt: Yes, if the ARVN continues to behave as they are now.

Dr. Kissinger: If the North Vietnamese learn they can pick the area of combat, we will be back in some respects to the situation we used to face.

Gen. Vogt: The Cambodian Army is getting better. It is operating north of Route 7 in an area it has never been in before.

Dr. Kissinger: What is the impact of Lam Son on the South Vietnamese domestic situation?

Gen. Cushman: It will result in propaganda battles. There are several variables involved. The enemy wants to reconstruct his supply network in the Tchepone area, but he will also want to show that he has some sting left. Thus, he may try an attack in the north, perhaps in Quang Tri Province.

Another variable is the level of enemy attacks in the next few months. We believe the flow of supplies around Tchepone can replace the earlier losses in Cambodia and can sustain existing enemy activity without, however, permitting any increase.

The enemy will have problems because manpower losses have been very high, but they were higher in Tet 1968. This is a short-term loss. We believe Hanoi figures it can protect its supply lines even if at great cost. This will increase their confidence.

On the other hand, they will have to realize that they can't go all out or raise the effort in South Vietnam or Cambodia significantly. They will see that they are no nearer to ending the war.

They may search for a way to thrash back at us. They will make an effort to show they are still around.

All of these things will affect political opinion. This operation will provide a springboard to Hanoi. It ended two weeks early. The U.S. press is on their side. Saigon will have to take steps to get the facts known. We have a campaign going on this, but it will have to be done overtly in Saigon.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Sullivan) What do you think the impact will be in South Vietnam?

Mr. Sullivan: The facts will not be very important a month from now. What will be significant will be the attitudes of the South Vietnamese Government. We know the North Vietnamese will claim victory. I think the South Vietnamese ought to get on their white horse, too, treat these troops as heroes, and create the impression that they are satisfied that there is a significant balance in their favor.

One concern I have is what the North Vietnamese can do to exploit the rollback in pacification successes which we have observed in the northern provinces.

Dr. Kissinger: Couldn't they have done this anyway? If the Lam Son operation had not been conducted, wouldn't their chances of hurting the pacification effort have been even greater?

Mr. Sullivan: Yes. The important thing is the impression which Saigon puts out. A fair, honest appraisal won't gain any political advantages. This is something the President of the United States can't do but that the President of South Vietnam can do.

I would be interested to know what Al Haig thinks about this.

Gen. Haig: I agree with what you have said. Thieu is a good barometer of the political situation in South Vietnam. He controls his press and is using it. He has said about Lam Son that: "You have a problem in the United States, but we have a victory here in Saigon." He also thinks the enemy is going to try to seize terrain in South Vietnam in order to show that the South Vietnamese Government can't protect its home terrain at a time when it is engaging in operations outside the country. The real problem is that some of Thieu's political opponents, particularly Ky, are going to try to raise doubts about the operation.

Gen. Cushman: Our reading is that right now Lam Son is a plus in Saigon.

Gen. Haig: I agree.

Mr. Johnson: That is the important thing.

Gen. Cushman: But this view will be under attack.

Mr. Sullivan: I just sent out to several posts the Saigon back-grounder on this.

Mr. Johnson: The problem is that the enemy and the opponents of the operation are going to overstate their case and that we will overstate ours in reaction.

I don't know about the international impact.

Dr. Kissinger: What about Japan?

Mr. Johnson: Knowing their press, I would say that they will conclude Lam Son was a defeat. The problem is how we counter this or whether we can do so.

Mr. Doolin: Lee Kuan-yew³ made a good statement referring to the "salutary effect" of the operation.

Mr. Sullivan: I think the international reaction will be that the operation failed to achieve its objectives. To try to combat this with statistics and figures will just get us into a mess.

Dr. Kissinger: There is no danger of that. We don't have any figures.

Mr. Packard: The most effective thing we could do would be to have two more operations down there.

Dr. Kissinger: It would also be useful to have one plan that comes off.

Mr. Johnson: Last night I was talking to [Senator] Jack Miller⁴ about this. I pointed out to him that it wasn't very long ago that we were fighting for possession of Saigon.

Dr. Kissinger: Yes, I have found that argument very effective. Also, you can say that they should look at the consumption requirements of the additional North Vietnamese units. We can forget about truck-kill figures.

Mr. Packard: An operation like Lam Son would have been unthinkable two years ago.

Mr. Johnson: It would help if we could develop this theme further.

Dr. Kissinger: Yes. We can use that theme and two others: that the enemy logistic flow has been cut down and that an enemy offensive has been pre-empted.

Mr. Johnson: That [the pre-emption of an enemy offensive] is kind of doubtful.

Mr. Doolin: We can say that they are carrying the war to the enemy outside of populated areas.

Mr. Sullivan: That's a good point.

Mr. Johnson: We need to discuss this.

³ Lee Kuan Yew was the Prime Minister of Singapore.

⁴ Senator Jack Miller (R-IA).

Dr. Kissinger: Why don't we do it? We have a meeting scheduled for Thursday afternoon on the logistical situation. Why don't we each prepare some basic themes? Then we can get an agreed set of themes that we all should use. Each of us can do this and have them ready for discussion on Thursday afternoon. We can do this at the end of the meeting.

165. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, March 25, 1971, 5–6:50 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

Vietnam

Dobrynin then asked me whether I had any communication to make to him for Hanoi. He said he was doing this entirely on his own because he knew he would meet the top Hanoi leaders. I replied I had nothing to add to what I had already told him. Dobrynin said, "are you sure you have nothing to say?" I replied, "I have told you once before that if Hanoi wants to talk seriously, I'm ready." Dobrynin said, "but is that really all you want me to tell them?" I said, "yes, there's nothing to add to what I have already told you." Dobrynin continued, "do you recognize this is a unique chance to talk to the top leadership?" I responded, "I have given you some of my private ideas early in January. We have always been ready to talk to Hanoi, but Hanoi's

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 491, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1971, Vol. 5, Part 1. Top Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. The meeting was held in the Map Room of the White House. The ending time of the meeting is taken from Kissinger's Record of Schedule. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76) The memorandum of conversation was forwarded to Nixon under a March 30 covering memorandum in which Kissinger wrote, "Dobrynin pressed me repeatedly on March 25 for a possible communication for him to carry to the North Vietnamese leaders who would be in Moscow for the Party Congress." Kissinger added that he refused to provide a specific message that exceeded the January 9 terms, namely "that a separation of political and military issues was a possible negotiating approach." Both memoranda are printed in full in *Foreign Relations*, 1969–1976, volume XIII, Soviet Union, October 1970–October 1971, Documents 154 and 164.

representatives have never said anything in their conversations with me that differed in the slightest from what they had already said in Paris publicly. Under those conditions, unless I know there's something really to talk about I cannot go beyond what I told you on January 8."² Dobrynin said he would communicate this but that he thought the Soviet government was prepared to carry messages if we wanted it to. I told him I would keep that in mind.

² Reference should be to the January 9 meeting; see Document 101.

166. Memorandum From K. Wayne Smith of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, March 25, 1971.

SUBJECT

South Laos/Lam Son Logistics Analysis

Introduction

CIA has produced a first-rate analysis of the logistics situation in South Laos (at Tab B).² If you disregard the rhetoric on enemy intentions (probably Carver's) Walsh's analysts have done a superb job. (Incidentally Walsh has consistently refused to allow his otherwise willing analysts to be more quantitative. In this case your specific demands, fully endorsed by Helms, could not be denied.) I think you should go out of your way to compliment this CIA effort.

DIA has submitted a classic intelligence estimate (at Tab C)³ throwing in every bit of information available but without any analytical

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-80, WSAG Meetings, Lam Son 3-26-71. Top Secret. Sent for information.

² Attached but not printed is a March 25 covering memorandum from Helms to Kissinger and Intelligence Memorandum SC04513/71, March 1971, "The Impact of Logistics Factors on NVA Offensive Capabilities During 1971."

³ Attached but not printed is a memorandum from Packard to Kissinger, March 25, with a report entitled, "The Situation and Outlook for Indochina."

structure. Where DIA provides comparable data I take it into account. Particularly on throughput data, DIA and CIA have stated their positions fully. But DIA does not appear to have grasped the concept of the model you put forward, a major virtue of which is that it can be solved without throughput data.

It is interesting to note that while the CIA calculations are done on a slightly different basis than ours, the results are generally the same. Their findings have led CIA to conclude that this dry season's logistics effort:

“. . . will be adequate for the Communists to sustain military activity at the low levels observed during 1970 [the “hot war” is at last defined].

“[It] will not permit the Communists to build up any significant volume of stockpiles and will make it imperative that their next logistic offensive get off to an extremely early start next dry season.⁴

“In sum, North Vietnam's logistic position over the past year has become greatly complicated. Far from enjoying a wide range of logistic options to support alternative strategies, Hanoi appears tied, for 1971 at least, to a continuation of the low-profile war fought in 1970. While the enemy's logistic situation does not preclude an occasional high point of combat activity in either South Vietnam or Cambodia, major sustained warfare seems definitely to be ruled out.”

Strategy for WSAG Meeting

Your talking points focus first on obtaining a consensus on the incremental demands on the Trail system this year compared with a year ago.⁵

Next, you attempt to get the intelligence community to agree on input levels thus far this year and to lay out what the enemy can do logistically for the balance of the dry season and into the wet season.

Third, you raise the throughput estimate issues and the alternative CIA and DIA views to see how they confirm the results obtained from the incremental input analysis.

Fourth, focussing again on the incremental input requirement this year versus last year and weighing this year's total requirement against his possible efforts for the balance of the dry season, you seek to obtain agreement on the conclusions the logistics data will support. (These

⁴ Brackets are in the original.

⁵ Kissinger's talking points are in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-80, WSAG Meetings, Lam Son 3-26-71.

conclusions are those in CIA's memorandum and are very similar to those we came to a week ago.)

Comparative Analysis of CIA, DIA, and NSC Estimates of Incremental Demands on Logistic System This Year

The CIA, DIA, and NSC estimates of 1971 increments are summarized in the following table:

Estimates of Increased Input Requirements for 1970–71 Versus 1969–70 Dry Seasons

	CIA	NSC	DIA
1. Sihanoukville	5,520–8,160	21,000	no estimate
2. Increased Non-Combat Consumption to Support Enlarged South Laos Force	7,900		
3. Lam Son Caches Destroyed or Captured	3,650	2,118	3,500–4,800
4. Combat Consumption to Cope with Lam Son	3,070	900	2,300–2,600
5. 1971 Bombing Increment over 1970	0 20,140– 22,780	6,000 30,018	no estimate

The major difference between the NSC and CIA estimates is that NSC estimates that about 8,000 more tons are required to replace Sihanoukville.

Two different methodologies are used. NSC applied a conservative trail mix factor (25% ordnance) to the ordnance flow through Sihanoukville that could be reasonably attributed to 1970 (5,000 tons). This method of calculation necessarily incorporates the food and POL input increments to move the increased ordnance that in 1969–70 passed through Sihanoukville.

CIA does a more detailed item-by-item analysis breaking out the consumption requirement for the increased force in South Laos in a separate calculation.

Their approach may have produced a low estimate because:

—they use a figure of 10,000 for the increased force in South Laos in early 1971 versus early 1970. This appears to be low by CIA's own

estimates. CIA Memo 71–32 dated February, 1971⁶ states, “During 1970 the NVA bolstered its force structure in southern Laos by 20,000 men concentrated heavily in the Tchepone area.”

—their methodology does not explicitly account for the incremental POL requirement to move the Sihanoukville increment down the Trail. Our intercepts show that at or near the top of the Trail in early 1971 the mix was 20% ordnance, 60% food, 15% POL and 5% other supplies.

You should point out the NSC method of calculation which tends to suggest items 1 and 2 of CIA’s analysis are underestimated.

You should also ask whether DIA and CIA agree on the consumption figures used for enemy forces in South Vietnam and Laos. I believe there is a real possibility that the intelligence community has underestimated badly external logistics requirements for enemy forces.

Such underestimates are suggested by the extent to which CIA believed the enemy did not *need* Sihanoukville, a belief that may have moved CIA to its mistaken estimate. Page 6 of the CIA memo acknowledges that between 1966 and 1970 the enemy perceived its requirements to be “1.5 times greater than our estimates of current ordnance requirements.” Whenever the enemy claims it has more control in the countryside than GVN data show, CIA agrees with them. Why do they discount the enemy’s estimate of his own logistics needs? One wonders if GVN pacification progress has made the enemy more dependent on external supplies than in the past and whether our estimates reflect an increasing reliance on external sources of supplies.

CIA is correct on items 3 and 4 because they used more recent and complete estimates. However, the North Vietnamese are saying (in Paris to Burchett,⁷ for example) that while ARVN destroyed some caches, large quantities of U.S. air dropped supplies have fallen into NVA hands. DIA should be asked for its view of this assessment.

Finally CIA’s estimate does not include an increment to offset *incremental* bombing effectiveness this year. The NSC estimate was 6,000 tons. Should this be cranked in. On the other hand, CIA uses a 25% loss factor to bombing on the Trail. You might ask what evidence there is to support such an estimate.

Once the differences are resolved, an agreed increment will result. However, even using the 20,000 to 30,000 range bounded by the NSC and CIA models, the next step in the analysis can be taken.

⁶ Not found.

⁷ As reported in CIA Intelligence Information Cable TDCS–315/01185–71, March 8, which Smith forwarded to Kissinger under a March 25 covering memorandum. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 153, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, 11 Feb 1971–28 March 1971) Wilfred Burchett was a left-wing journalist associated with Communist causes and close to leading North Vietnamese Communists.

Calculating the Total Input for 1970–1971

CIA calculates the *normal* input requirement for the Panhandle to be 54,000 tons. NSC used last year's input figure of 60,000 as a proxy for the normal requirement. You might ask CIA how the estimated normal requirement of 54,000 tons compares with last year's input and what conclusions one draws from any difference.

Below are the estimates for total input requirements this dry season to sustain 1970 rates of activity.

	CIA	NSC
"normal" (1969–70)	54,000	60,000
increment (1970–1971)	20,140–22,780	30,018
Total (1970–1971)	74,140–76,780	90,018

Comparing Total Input Required to Total Capacity

If we know the range of the total input estimates (74,000 to 90,000), this can be compared with possible throughput in 1970–1971. Assuming the enemy continues to move supplies well into May, CIA estimates total input at between a minimum of 70,000 tons and a maximum of 89,000 tons depending on whether one includes pipeline and waterway capacities.

This range of estimates, which can be updated as additional data come in, is probably acceptable to DIA (our estimate was 74,000 tons) although DIA should be asked.

Estimate of Level of Activity

Conclusions can be drawn on the basis of input data alone. Both CIA and DIA provide their throughput estimates. DIA's is a guess. CIA's is based on a credible model that they might be asked to explain. But the data are soft and I doubt whether throughput data should be used except as an adjunct to input data. It could tell us if conclusions drawn from input data are way off the mark.

Deriving conclusions from the input data is simple. CIA projects total demand to be 74,140 to 76,780 compared with a total capacity of 70,000 (minimum) to 89,000 (maximum). One can safely draw the conclusions CIA drew (spelled out at the beginning of this memorandum) from these data. The basis for these conclusions will probably be strengthened by refinements of CIA's data because they should serve to raise total requirements closer to even maximum capacity.

I am bothered, however, by CIA's tautological reasoning on enemy intentions. From their study of enemy intentions, CIA expects a protracted war and views the results of their analysis as a confirmation of their expectations. This is wrong. What the analysis says, as indeed the CIA memorandum tells us, is that the enemy has little choice in 1971.

Addendum

We were told by CIA that they sought to get DIA on board for a joint analysis along the lines you requested, but DIA refused.

Your talking points will be sent over later this evening.

167. Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, March 26, 1971, 10:09–11:29 a.m.

PART I

SUBJECT

Intelligence on North Vietnamese Supply Movements

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	JCS
State	Admiral Thomas H. Moorer
Mr. U. Alexis Johnson	OMB
Ambassador William Sullivan	Mr. James Schlesinger
Mr. Ray Cline	NSC Staff
Defense	Mr. Wayne Smith
Mr. David Packard	Col. Richard T. Kennedy
Mr. Dennis J. Doolin	Mr. John H. Holdridge
Lt. Gen. Donald V. Bennett	Mr. Robert L. Sansom
CIA	Mr. Keith Guthrie
Mr. Richard Helms	
Mr. George Carver	
Mr. Paul Walsh	

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. *Enemy Logistical Performance.* The WSAG reviewed the CIA and DIA assessments of enemy logistical performance² and agreed that both assessments indicated that the North Vietnamese had not significantly improved their logistical situation in 1970–71 relative to 1969–70. Therefore, the prospects, for 1971, at least, appeared to be for a continuation

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Nodis. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. Part II is Document 168.

² See Document 166.

of the enemy's protracted warfare strategy although occasional high points of combat activity were possible.

2. *Enemy Threat in 1971–72.* CIA, DIA, and the NSC staff will jointly review the logistical assessments with a view to refining the data and preparing a projection of the enemy military threat during the next eighteen months. This projection should be broken down by geographic areas (Cambodia and the four military regions of South Vietnam) and should indicate the time frame in which the enemy could be expected to develop a capability to launch a major offensive in each of these areas. Estimates should be made using two alternative assumptions on U.S. air support: (a) slightly less than current levels and (b) 30% less than current levels.

3. *Progress Chart on Vietnam War.* The Defense Department will submit by March 31 the final version of its comparative table of statistical indicators and other facts relating to the progress of the war in Indochina during 1969–71.

4. *Lam Son as Seen by Hanoi.* The WSAG agreed that it would be useful to have an assessment of how the North Vietnamese evaluate the Lam Son operation. However, it was agreed that this analysis could be deferred until completion of the other studies requested at this meeting.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

168. Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, March 26, 1971, 10:09–11:29 a.m.

PART II

SUBJECT

Public Information Policy on Lam Son

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	OMB
State	Mr. James Schlesinger
Mr. U. Alexis Johnson	White House
Ambassador William Sullivan	Mr. H.R. Haldeman
Defense	NSC Staff
Mr. David Packard	B/Gen. Alexander Haig
Mr. Dennis J. Doolin	Col. Richard T. Kennedy
CIA	Keith Guthrie
Mr. Richard Helms	
JCS	
Admiral Thomas H. Moorer	

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. A NSC/State/Defense working group chaired by Col. Kennedy of the NSC staff will prepare by March 30 a statement on the contribution of Lam Son to the Vietnamization program. This statement should be designed to provide public information policy guidance to USG officials and should be based on the President's television statements of March 22² and on the draft State Department paper circulated at the WSAG meeting.

2. To assist in developing suitable press guidance, JCS will ascertain MACV's intentions regarding future US military activity in the Khe Sanh area.

3. State and Defense will instruct General Abrams and Ambassador Bunker to consult with President Thieu concerning the public in-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Nodis. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. Part I is Document 167.

² See footnote 3, Document 156.

formation policy followed by the South Vietnamese Government in connection with Lam Son.³

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

³The request was sent in telegram 51947 to Saigon, March 27. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 153, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 11 Feb 71–28 Mar 71) Bunker responded in telegram 4508 from Saigon, March 28: "I think it fair to say that Vietnamese public reaction to Lam Son 719 went through three phases—an initial euphoria, followed by doubts in the latter part of February that the campaign was going according to plan, and finally, a resurgence of confidence in ARVN and pride in its accomplishments." Kissinger forwarded Bunker's telegram to Nixon under a March 29 covering memorandum. (Ibid., Box 85, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations 20 March 71)

169. Memorandum for the President's File by the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)¹

Washington, March 26, 1971, 4 p.m.

SUBJECT

Meeting with the President, Secretary of Defense Laird, Secretary of the Treasury Connally, Deputy Secretary of Defense Packard, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Moorer, Henry A. Kissinger and Brigadier General Alexander M. Haig, Jr.²

The President opened the meeting by stating that the time had now arrived when it became imperative that we consider carefully what will happen to the South Vietnamese next May, June, and July when U.S. force levels will have been drastically reduced. The President stated that he wanted to be absolutely sure that the South Vietnamese armed forces have all they need in the way of helicopters, planes, artillery and supplies.

The second item that he wished to discuss was one which posed a budgetary problem—U.S. sortie rates in Southeast Asia. The President stated he wishes to be sure that we maintain a high level of air sorties at least through the U.S. elections. He added that at some point we might get a break on the negotiating front and if, for example, the other side agreed to a prisoner exchange and mutual withdrawal by July 1 of 1972, we would probably have to accept the proposal. If so, we would then wish to be sure that the South Vietnamese have enough military equip-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 997, Haig Chronological Files, Haig Memcons, 12/70–12/71, 3 of 3. Top Secret; Nodis.

² The meeting took place in the Oval Office. It ended at 4:25 p.m. according to the President's Daily Diary. (Ibid., White House Central Files)

ment to protect themselves. The President stated that he had spoken to the columnist Joe Alsop the other day and Alsop had expressed his concern about the South Vietnamese residual capability. He stated that Alsop has been a good friend and although he may be crazy on this particular issue, nevertheless he wished to be assured. He added that we have sacrificed 45,000 U.S. lives in this conflict and we must do all in our power to ensure that the South Vietnamese survive.

Dr. Kissinger confirmed that the White House had received Secretary Laird's memorandum on South Vietnamese modernization³ but that he had not had an opportunity to analyze the paper in any detail. He added, however, that he shared the President's concern that we provide adequate equipment levels for the South Vietnamese. They must be able to move their divisions from corps area to corps area and our sortie levels must remain high through 1972.

Secretary Laird stated that current plans provided for a high sortie level through 1973. He stated that he had just discussed the FY 1973 B-52 level with the JCS. He had planned a level of 700 sorties per month for that fiscal year, but the Chiefs had asked that it be held at 800. The Secretary stated that the principal constraint on the provision of helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft was pilot training and the training of technical personnel. Admiral Moorer stated that because of the training lead time we planned to keep U.S. helicopters and tactical air in Southeast Asia until the end of the Vietnamization program.

Secretary Laird stated that in order to keep our air levels up he had decided to withdraw some U.S. forces from Thailand but to replace them with Air Force personnel, thus not reducing our overall strength in Thailand. He added that we also have the ability to maintain our carrier capability. This was especially worthwhile, since these forces were not included in our in-country tabulations. Admiral Moorer added that these forces do not need U.S. security.

Secretary Connally asked Secretary Laird what level of spares would be left for major items of equipment such as helicopters. Secretary Laird stated that the regular allocation of spares would be left. Secretary Connally stated that once we withdraw from Vietnam it will be most difficult to get Congressional support for the provision of additional equipment for South Vietnam. Therefore, we should leave a good pool of spares as we depart. Secretary Laird stated that our ability to

³ Kissinger forwarded Laird's undated memorandum to Nixon under a March 26 covering memorandum. Laird noted that the RVNAF should be at full strength, 1.1 million troops, in FY 1973, and fully equipped, and that while the United States would reduce tactical sortie rates by more than half, the combined GVN and RLG rates would only be at 1971 levels. Kissinger voiced concern that air power, particularly in helicopter capability, would be lagging. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 153, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 11 Feb 71–28 Mar 71)

supply the South Vietnamese was contingent upon the Department of Defense's continual responsibility for the Military Assistance Program. The President asked Dr. Kissinger whether or not he had approved the transfer of this responsibility to the Department of State. Dr. Kissinger stated that the paper he had approved provided for status quo, emphasizing that the Defense Department responsibility had not been altered.

Secretary Connally stated that he believed that if the South Vietnamese needed 500 helicopters then we should leave them a thousand. The President agreed, stating that once we depart it will be very difficult to get additional equipment.

Secretary Laird stated that there was some disagreement within the South Vietnamese military on the levels of helicopters and aircraft that were needed. Thieu would be satisfied with 625 and with 50 aircraft squadrons; he agreed, however, that he would put more in if the South Vietnamese will accept. The President stated that whatever we can leave should be left.

Secretary Laird stated that he also was concerned about Thieu's desire to cut back on the size of his armed forces before his election in October. The President commented that it is a shame that the U.S. forced Thieu to have an election at a time when his country was at war. Secretary Connally stated that the U.S. had been doing this to its friends for many years.

Dr. Kissinger stated that he would work with Secretary Laird in analyzing the sortie levels and the equipment levels.

Secretary Connally stated that he noted that some of the Democrats are beginning to be concerned about our ability to terminate U.S. involvement. They are therefore talking about a terminal date of their own which would permit them to get the credit. He stated this movement was surfacing in the Democratic Caucus which would meet on March 31.

The President stated that he had met with Senators Albert and Boggs that morning⁴ and had spoken to them bluntly about Laos. He stated that he told them that he had absolutely no incentive to lie about the accomplishments achieved there and suggested that they judge the operation on our withdrawals. If they proceed, the operation should be considered successful. The President informed them that he had a

⁴ McGregor prepared a memorandum for the President's file of the meeting, which was held from 8:30 to 9:45 a.m. According to this memorandum, Representatives Carl Albert (D-OK) and Hale Boggs (D-LA) informed the President that they were obliged to call a caucus to debate an "end of war" resolution because they had been petitioned by more than 50 colleagues. However, they assured Nixon that "they would each fight the inclusion of any date in the Democrats' resolution. Each expressed the view to the President that they could not stop a resolution (like that passed by Senate Democrats) containing the words 'withdrawal by a date certain,' but they emphasized that they would fight the naming of any specific date." (Ibid., White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 84, Memoranda for the President, Beginning March 21, 1971)

plan to end our involvement at the earliest possible date and that the date he had selected was appropriate for all of the factors which had to be considered: negotiations, Vietnamization, etc.

The President stated that if the Congress selects its own date it would be giving the option to the enemy; there would be no need for them to negotiate. If the Congress wants to push on this issue and take over with an arbitrary date, the Executive will go along but the Congress will have to take the onus for a U.S. defeat and for the ultimate Communization of South Vietnam. The President stated that under his plan he has the responsibility, and if it should fail, then is the time for the Congress to call him to task. The President told them that this is the game that he would play were he on the Hill. But if the Congress wanted to go the other route he would hold them responsible before the American people. If the House and the Senate place a terminal date or limited Presidential funds, the chances are high that we will lose all the stakes.

Deputy Secretary of Defense Packard stated that our plan will work. Secretary Laird stated that we can keep our air sortie levels up even after we have drawn down to 50,000 Americans in-country. Deputy Secretary Packard stated that Defense was also sending more gunships next year.

The President told Secretary Laird to inform the Democratic Caucus that he is on his way out of Vietnam at the fastest rate possible and that this route involved risks. His way will save South Vietnam; a faster rate will lose it. Secretary Laird stated that Senator Teague⁵ was worried. The President told Mr. Laird to tell Teague to wait for his announcement in April since it will be a good one.

The President then asked Admiral Moorer to brief the group on the status of the operation. Admiral Moorer utilized a map which showed the deployments of U.S. and ARVN forces in South Vietnam in the Khe Sanh area. He stated that General Abrams had informed him that only 17 effective battalions remain of the enemy's 33 original battalions. Of these, nine are deployed north of Route 9 and eight are deployed south of the highway. He stated that the South Vietnamese had moved the reserve regiment of their first division as a buffer between the border and U.S. forces. He made the following additional points:

- The enemy had only 30 or 40 of its original 150 tanks.
- We expected some harassment and attacks by fire in the Khe Sanh area.
- The enemy had now diverted some troops to repair their line of communications.
- There is no threatening activity within the DMZ.

The President asked if we were going to evacuate Khe Sanh and the Chairman replied that we were merely in the process of thinning out our

⁵ Representative Olin Teague (D-TX).

forces there, adding that we would probably hold the base until May. The President asked about the reported movement of artillery into the DMZ. The Chairman stated there had been some heavy artillery in the central DMZ from the outset and that the enemy was moving some light artillery across the border from Laos into the western DMZ.

The President inquired about the effectiveness of the air strikes against the north and instructed Secretary Laird and the Chairman to have a plan ready for additional strikes. Admiral Moorer stated that the weather would improve with each day and that adequate plans were ready for execution within 48 hours. The President instructed the Chairman to keep the pass areas under surveillance and as soon as targets built up to inform him immediately.

The President then inquired about the reported high ARVN casualties caused by AP the day before. Secretary Laird stated that the report was erroneous and that it had been filed by Tammy Arbuckle. He said that after he had called the wire service they stopped running the report. The President commented that Arbuckle was the same reporter who had created such concerns about Cambodia. He added that as the people became more fed up with the war this kind of reporting became more popular. Nevertheless, we have to hit them each time.

The President asked Secretary Laird to work with the Congress and to meet with Democrats and Republicans during the coming week. Secretary Laird stated that he had done a thorough job this week but that no one would step out front. The President asked whether Secretary Rogers was going to do some work. Secretary Laird stated that he would probably have to retestify on the Middle East and that he thought this was more important. [Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

170. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker)¹

Washington, March 27, 1971.

This message is designed to provide you with insights on the President's current thinking with respect to the next troop withdrawal an-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 85, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File March 20 on. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Drafted by Kissinger and Haig. The original is the text as approved for transmission. It was sent as message WHS 1026.

nouncement. The information contained herein is known only to the President and myself and must, therefore, be held strictly to yourself. Secretary Rogers is the only other government official who has an indication of the President's thinking. I anticipate that Secretary Laird and the Chairman, and consequently General Abrams, will not be informed until just prior to the President's announcement.

The President now plans to announce the withdrawal of 100,000 or 104,000 additional U.S. troops through December 1, 1971. He contemplates that perhaps 48 hours in advance of his announcement which is now scheduled for April 7th in Washington that you inform Thieu of his decision. You could concurrently advise Thieu that we will retain more than 200,000 troops in South Vietnam through his election and that the heaviest withdrawals will be made during the latter part of October and November.

I would foresee no difficulty in Thieu's emphasizing the 200,000 figure sometime in July to meet his own political needs. It may be possible to arrange a meeting between President Nixon and President Thieu in July somewhere in the Pacific. However, the President has not yet agreed to such a meeting so its possibility must be confined strictly to you. Should such a meeting be held, I would visualize the following sequence of events:

—On April 7, the President will announce his intention to withdraw either 100,000 or 104,000 U.S. troops from South Vietnam by December 1, 1971.

—Sometime in July, President Nixon and President Thieu would meet somewhere in the Pacific.

In conjunction with this meeting, President Thieu might announce that he has informed President Nixon that ARVN forces will be prepared to take over the ground security of South Vietnam effective 1 January 1972, and that he has been assured by President Nixon that U.S. force levels will remain above 200,000 through October 15, 1971. President Nixon, of course, would have to make the point that although the ground security mission will be turned over to the South Vietnamese by the first of the year, U.S. forces will continue to take whatever local security measures are necessary to provide for their own security. This would mean that active patrolling and offensive action would still be required of U.S. forces to the degree that enemy action makes this necessary. The President might again include a stiff warning to Hanoi with respect to his determination to prevent the enemy's taking advantage of our withdrawals. The President would also reaffirm his intention of providing necessary air support to the South Vietnamese for the indefinite future.

Before proceeding further with this plan, I would be grateful for your personal views on an urgent basis on the following:

1. The timing and modalities of your coordination of the President's announcement with President Thieu.

2. The desirability of a meeting between the Presidents sometime in July, to include your thoughts on the venue, precise timing and the agenda and related announcements which might be expected to result from the meeting.

I am sure you recognize that the withdrawal announcement contemplated by the President is a large one. However, it has become all the more necessary in view of the mixed results of the Lamson 719 operation and its unexpected conclusion which has placed the President under increasing political pressure here.

For this reason, the President is determined to proceed with an announcement of at least 100,000 through December 1, 1971. This exceeds the withdrawal rates contained in General Abrams' recent submission to Secretary Laird² and will undoubtedly pose some difficult political problems for President Thieu. At the same time holding public opinion here after Lamson is an absolute imperative and is in the long run more useful to Thieu than anything else we might do. It is therefore necessary that we have your best thinking on how to limit the damage in the process of coordinating the President's decision.

Best regards.

² According to memorandum CM-766-71 from Moorer to Laird, April 1, Abrams agreed with Moorer's recommendation for the following minimum force levels through 1971: 255,000 by June 30; 233,000 by October 31; and 199,000 by December 31. He also recommended that the following monthly sortie levels be approved: 10,000 tactical air and 1,000 B-52s through FY 1972; and 8,000 tactical air and 1,000 B-52s through FY 1973. (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330-76-207, Box 5, 337 WH)

171. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, March 29, 1971.

SUBJECT

South Vietnamese Morale

Attached are three reports from Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams on the state of South Vietnamese morale following the opera-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 153, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 29 Mar 71-8 Apr 71. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

tion in Laos. In commenting on the morale of military units (Tab A),² General Abrams states that:

—The general performance of the individual soldiers and the majority of their units was very creditable.

—Although casualties have reduced the strength and weakened the leadership structure at the lower levels in a few units, the morale of these units is expected to improve and eventually reach the high level enjoyed by other participants in the operation as replacements are made available and unit accomplishments become more widely known.

—Morale suffered in certain ARVN combat units which were heavily engaged for extended periods of time, operated over difficult terrain, and experienced heavy casualties. However, even units with heavy casualties fought valiantly and inflicted many enemy losses. One battalion ended up with only 110 effectives but reportedly has maintained its esprit.³

In assessing public reaction and possible political consequences (Tab B),⁴ Ambassador Bunker observes that:

—The Vietnamese public reaction went through three phases: an initial euphoria, followed by doubt in the latter part of February that the campaign was going according to plan, and finally a resurgence of confidence in the ARVN and pride in its accomplishments.

—The resurgence of confidence, which began with the advance to Tchepone in early March and was stimulated by reports that the ARVN was acquitting itself well against a numerically superior enemy, has persisted.

—During the past two weeks there have been widespread public manifestations of support. For example, demonstrations in support of the armed forces were planned in every Province for March 27. (President Thieu indicated that these were not government sponsored or managed.)

—There is pride in ARVN ability to conduct two campaigns outside the borders of Vietnam simultaneously. The people were encour-

² Attached but not printed at Tab A is a retyped copy of a cable from Abrams to McCain, March 23. The original was sent as message 230100Z Mar 71 from Abrams to Moorer and McCain. (Ibid., Box 85, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, 20 March 71)

³ Abrams also sent a report on the enemy's intentions in a March 23 message, a typed copy of which Kissinger forwarded to Nixon under a March 29 covering memorandum. Abrams wrote that there were indications that Hanoi was planning additional tactical activity in the Khe Sanh area, but that because of its manpower and logistics losses in Laos and lack of reinforcements it would not be able to attack the city. Instead, Abrams expected the enemy to harass Khe Sanh and Route 9 with small probing attacks while it continued to restore and defend its logistical system. (Ibid.)

⁴ Attached but not printed at Tab B is backchannel message 787 from Bunker to Kissinger, March 25. See also footnote 3, Document 168.

aged to see ARVN take the initiative and there was a feeling that this indicated a shift in the balance of power. The fact that the fighting may have forestalled North Vietnamese attacks in South Vietnam has been especially appreciated.

—Although there has been very little public disapproval of the operation, the number of casualties suffered remains a sensitive issue. The major overt critic of the operation has been Vice President Ky.

—There is considerable divergence between the Vietnamese interpretation of the results and the view presented in the foreign press. The view of the Vietnamese press, both pro-administration and oppositionist, is that the operation was a heavily fought engagement in which some things went wrong but that basic objectives were achieved and the ARVN fought admirably.

—While it is too early to evaluate the political impact of the operation with assurance, it appears to have been a political plus because of the confidence and pride it has created in the ability and accomplishments of ARVN. There has been satisfaction that the fighting took place outside the borders of South Vietnam and that ARVN inflicted heavier casualties on the enemy.

In an earlier interim report (Tab C)⁵ following a meeting with President Thieu, Ambassador Bunker noted that:

—President Thieu reflects the general mood throughout the country of pride in the ARVN's accomplishment and confidence in its ability.

—He is still determined to go ahead with several other raids in Laos.⁶

⁵ Attached but not printed at Tab C is backchannel message 766 from Bunker to Kissinger, March 24.

⁶ In telegram 53867 to Saigon, April 1, the Department instructed Bunker to deliver a message to Thieu from Nixon acknowledging "the great respect and admiration he has for the valor of the armed forces of the Republic of Vietnam in this historic effort," noting that they faced a numerically superior force. The message also noted that because the enemy's logistics were disrupted and so many of its first line troops were destroyed, GVN security had been significantly enhanced. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 153, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 29 Mar 71–8 Apr 71)

172. Minutes of a Meeting of the 40 Committee¹

San Clemente, March 31, 1971, 10:26–11:55 a.m.

SUBJECT

Various—see summary of conclusions

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	CIA
State	Lt. Gen. Robert E. Cushman
Mr. U. Alexis Johnson	Mr. Thomas Karamessines
Defense	Mr. William Nelson ²
Mr. David Packard	Mr. Horace Feldman ²
JCS	Mr. David Blee ²
Lt. Gen. Richard T. Knowles	NSC Staff
	Mr. Frank M. Chapin
	Col. Richard T. Kennedy
	Mr. Keith Guthrie

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed to:

1. Approve a proposal for employment of Thai SGUs in Sayaboury Province in Laos. (pages 2–3)
2. Use gunships stationed at Udorn, Thailand to provide cover for medical evacuation flights in North Laos. (pages 3–4)
3. Establish a DOD/CIA/State task force to report to the Committee by April 14 on means for providing increased Defense Department support to CIA paramilitary operations in Laos. (pages 6–7)
4. Have a special inter-agency group prepare a study of 1971–72 options in North Laos for discussion by the WSAG in early May. (page 10)
5. Approve the budget for CIA paramilitary operations in Laos. (page 11)

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Southeast Asia.]

Dr. Kissinger: I take it you have been discussing Thai deployments to Sayaboury.

Mr. Johnson: Yes. We have just now received some new information which changes Dave Packard's and my views on this.

¹ Source: Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, 40 Committee Meetings. Top Secret; Nodis; Eyes Only. The meeting took place in the Conference Room of the Western White House. All brackets except those that indicate omissions are in the original.

² Not present for entire meeting. [Footnote in the original.]

(Mr. Johnson showed the telegrams³ to Mr. Kissinger.)

Gen. Cushman: This group would be composed of regulars and would count against the total of regulars projected for SGUs. No extra money would be required for this program, since these troops would proceed into SGU programs. The regulars are part of the 1,174-man cadre already planned for the program.

Mr. Karamessines: This is a very imaginative solution to the problem.

Mr. Johnson: On the basis of this proposal, we [the State Department] are prepared to withdraw our previous objections.

Dr. Kissinger: Is this satisfactory to the Thai?

Gen. Cushman: Yes, Ambassador Unger says so. He wants an answer tomorrow to give to the Thai.

Mr. Karamessines: A reply should be sent immediately.

(Mr. Karamessines left the meeting.)

Dr. Kissinger: Yes, why not go ahead and do it?

Mr. Johnson: There is a second item that was a late starter for this meeting. This is medevac for Ban Na. We were talking this over before the meeting and agreed that there would be great difficulty in stationing gunships in Laos. The Joint Staff is going to CINCPAC to see if it would not be possible to put the gunships in Udorn, realizing that they might have to refuel in Laos. There are two questions: whether we have the necessary assets and whether they should be stationed in Udorn.

Dr. Kissinger: Weren't Air America pilots to be used for this?

Mr. Packard: We were talking about gunships.

Mr. Nelson: The Air America pilots are doing the medevac.

Gen. Knowles: We were talking about gunships other than Cobras. I will ring out CINCPAC to see what is available.

Gen. Cushman: Cobras are not available.

Gen. Knowles: We will check this out, but it is unlikely that we can get any Cobras.

Dr. Kissinger: Let me see if I understand what has been agreed. We are going to station gunships in Udorn.

Gen. Knowles: We are going out to CINCPAC to see, first, if we can station gunships (probably of the UHB type) at Udorn and, second, whether they can be provided with range-extension kits or whether we can put some bladders in Laos for refueling. The B-type gunships have greater utility, since they can also do some medevac.

Dr. Kissinger: We can find out if it is feasible. If it proves to be feasible why not go ahead and do it?

³ Not further identified.

Mr. Packard: We decided that we should not base the gunships in Laos. We can approve a program that bases them in Thailand but provides for refueling in Laos.

Dr. Kissinger: I don't see what more we can learn once we determine whether this is technically feasible. Is everyone agreed that we should go ahead if this proposal is feasible.

All agreed. (Mr. Karamessines rejoined the meeting)

Dr. Kissinger: Now let's turn to the regular 40 Committee agenda.

Gen. Cushman: I view the first item as the most important that this committee has had or will have. We are not trying to run away from the problem, but it is evident from visits made by me, by Tom Karamessines and by a logistician that with the programs that are coming up, this is getting beyond the scope of our ability to organize. We are not manned and equipped to handle 80 battalions. What this involves is air support, planning, logistics and staff work for a force that amounts to a field army. Our people mostly have experience at the company-officer level. They are doing pretty well, but they are coming up against a stop. In conclusion, what we are saying is that CIA has raised a red flag. We are warning that this whole operation is in danger of dissolving like the one-horse shay.

Dr. Kissinger: What is the operational meaning of this? How would it dissolve?

Gen. Cushman: We could run out of supplies because they have not been programmed. We could be deficient on hospitalization and evacuation. This should be done by a planning staff made up of professional military people. If changes are not made, the Meo will dissolve. The Ban Ban operation has already provided an indication of what could happen.

We are not in the air support business. We lack the facilities for organization, maintenance, and execution. We can't run an air force. Now that the U.S. Air Force plans to pull out by 1973, we won't have anybody there to provide support.

Mr. Packard: That is not right.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Packard) Aren't you planning to shift air force units around [in Southeast Asia]?

Mr. Packard: The total level of air strength in Southeast Asia has not yet been decided, but we would like to maintain a substantial amount.

Gen. Knowles: We have some heavy requests for air support now. (to Gen. Cushman) Right now you are asking for 3400 sorties, but 3760 per quarter are all that we can provide.

(Dr. Kissinger left the meeting.)

Gen. Cushman: The number of maneuver units is going up.

Gen. Knowles: (shows figures on air sorties to Mr. Packard) This will explain availability and will shore up Bob's [Cushman's] comment

[about lack of air support]. We ought to get their [CIA's] guys to sit down with the Joint Staff to discuss this.

Mr. Packard: We may have to keep some more air capability there.

Gen. Knowles: We want to be sure that the forces approved [for guerrilla activities in Laos] do not exceed the resources available for evacuation.

Mr. Packard: I don't think it is feasible for Defense to take this over directly. It would kill us with Congress. Secretary Laird concurs on this.

Gen. Cushman: We agree about that.

Mr. Packard: It seems that we ought to look at Option B.⁴ We could set up a task force to do some planning.

Gen. Cushman: Some people could be put in Udorn to do the planning.

Mr. Karamessines: This would be not only for air support but also for materiel.

(Mr. Kissinger rejoined the meeting at this point.)

Gen. Cushman: We have never had anybody who could plan for a 6,000-man force.

Mr. Packard: (to Dr. Kissinger) Our view, and Secretary Laird supports it, is that Defense can't take over this program. It would be the end for us on the Hill.

Dr. Kissinger: Then who is going to do it? The State Department?

Mr. Johnson: We are already furnishing the field marshal [Ambassador Godley]!

Mr. Packard: Better planning needs to be done in order that we are not always operating on the basis of crash telegrams from the field. I think we need a joint planning task force made up of representatives of the Joint Staff, Defense and CIA. Maybe this planning mechanism should be put in Udorn.

Dr. Kissinger: We need a better control mechanism. Can't you supply officers at a forward base to do some of the planning?

Gen. Cushman: That's the middle option.

Mr. Packard: That is the only practical way to handle it.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Karamessines) Is this all right with you?

⁴ Helms discussed the options in a March 24 memorandum to the 40 Committee in which he argued that the CIA was not equipped to continue supporting the Laos paramilitary program, which would grow to 60,000 men in 1972. He recommended that an interagency working group examine the following options: A) turn the program over to the Defense Department; B) have CIA continue directing it, but with Defense funding and materiel assistance as well as U.S. tactical air support from Thailand; C) scale down the program in conjunction with the U.S. withdrawal until it was a small intelligence operation. (Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, 40 Committee Meetings)

Mr. Karamessines: Yes. I would have one additional suggestion: that we meet promptly in Washington to work out the ground rules for a collaborative effort.

Mr. Johnson: (to Mr. Packard) Are you going to send your people out to Udorn?

Mr. Packard: The Joint Staff will appoint two or three people to work with CIA. We could also have State representation.

Mr. Johnson: I would like to have that.

Mr. Packard: Our planning could then be done on some basis other than solving each crisis as it comes along.

Dr. Kissinger: Then we agree on the principle that we should increase JCS/DOD planning and logistical support but that operational control should be retained where it is now, keeping in mind the need to improve staff procedures. A task force, perhaps chaired by Defense, will work this out.

Mr. Packard: Perhaps operational procedures should also be changed

Dr. Kissinger: I agree.

Mr. Packard: The task force should have a broad charter.

Dr. Kissinger: What about air sorties?

Mr. Packard: The task force will work this out.

Dr. Kissinger: That is important in order not to be withdrawing from Thailand while we are putting more effort into Laos. Can we put a stop to further withdrawals from Thailand?

Gen. Knowles: That is not an immediate problem.

Dr. Kissinger: Then we can give task force a charter to cover tactical air, logistics, planning and operational procedures. We will need a short deadline.

Mr. Karamessines: We can do this later this week.

Gen. Knowles: We can go on it right now.

Dr. Kissinger: Why not have an answer in two weeks?

Gen. Cushman: Will JCS chair the group?

Dr. Kissinger: Okay.

(to Mr. Packard) Is that okay with you Dave? You don't think that Defense should chair?

Mr. Packard: I think it ought to be JCS.

Mr. Johnson: Sullivan will be my man on this group.

Dr. Kissinger: Now we come to two items labled CIA military programs and CIA paramilitary programs.

Gen. Cushman: This is to continue the program that we have going already. (to Mr. Nelson) Bill, can you discuss Item 2?

Mr. Nelson: Item 2 is a progress report on what has been done as of today and a request for permission to continue.

Dr. Kissinger: When CIA reaches the point of having the largest army in Southeast Asia, we better review the program!

Mr. Nelson: There are a total of 38 Lao SGUs. [*1½ lines not declassified*] There are four Cambodian SGUs.

Dr. Kissinger: What happened to the Thai SGUs that were roaming around near Long Tieng?

Mr. Nelson: They are still doing that.

Dr. Kissinger: But they are not finding anything.

Mr. Karamessines: They were very instrumental in clearing the northwest approaches to Long Tieng.

Mr. Nelson: If all the plans go through, we will have a force level of 60,000, consisting of 80 battalions. In terms of maneuver battalions that is worth about six or eight divisions. You are familiar with the program in MR 2 (in the Northeast) as a result of the Long Tieng defense operations. In other areas, the effort this year has been focused on the South Laos interdiction campaign. These troops have performed effectively on two different occasions. The real problem this year is whether we can keep the Meos fighting.

Mr. Karamessines: When I was out there, I talked with Vang Pao in the presence of his Thai associates. He explained that he was under pressure from the tribal leadership. In a recent meeting, the Governor of Xieng Khouang province got up and told Vang Pao that the Meo had gone about as far as they could go, that the refugees were being hit, that for years they had had no chance to put in crops or raise cattle, and that they had to be resettled in the Plaine des Jarres or in Sayaboury. Vang Pao has made such noises before, but those that know him say he is really under hard pressure.

Dr. Kissinger: His military situation is better now than at this time last year.

Mr. Karamessines: Yes, but he has lost a lot of people and the war is not permitting the Meo to put in their crops and raise their cattle. He says he has now been given an ultimatum by the tribal leaders. What he is saying in effect is that "you guys better plan for the possibility that there will not be any Meos available for the next round." Vang Pao is mercurial, but there has never been such dissension among the Meos before.

Mr. Johnson: What are their alternatives? They could move to Sayaboury.

Mr. Nelson: Vang Pao says that his people have to settle somewhere. Either we should make sure that they are able to go to the Plaine de Jarres or we should let them go to Sayaboury.

Dr. Kissinger: Then Long Tieng will fall.

Mr. Karamessines: There has been a real degradation in the Meo contribution in that area. The Long Tieng–Sam Thong complex is essentially defended by Thai SGUs.

Dr. Kissinger: Why should the Thai defend Long Tieng if the Meo are not doing anything?

Mr. Karamessines: The Thai are not there because of the Meos but because of the larger question of Thai security in Southeast Asia.

Gen. Cushman: The Thai believe they are keeping the enemy away from the Mekong.

Mr. Johnson: If the Meo are pulled out, it will be a different ball game.

Gen. Cushman: The Thai might prefer to make a stand on a different mountain ridge. Long Tieng has no special significance except that there is a base established there.

Dr. Kissinger: When would Vang Pao make his withdrawal?

Mr. Karamessines: He can last through this dry season and the next rainy season.

Dr. Kissinger: Then the withdrawal will be next fall. That is when we all come up against the sixty-four-dollar question.

Gen. Cushman: All of this fits in with the need to obtain JCS cooperation.

Mr. Karamessines: They have been fighting the good fight at Long Tieng. However, having seen the terrain first hand, I can say that there is no way of guaranteeing that two little bastards could not come down the trail, put one rocket in the ammunition dump, and wipe the whole place out.

Dr. Kissinger: Why don't you have several smaller ammunition dumps?

Mr. Karamessines: There is only one location protected by the hills. Any other place would be on open ground.

Gen. Cushman: If there were small dumps, that would mean that several places would have to be protected against sappers.

Mr. Karamessines: They are doing an extraordinary job with what they have.

Dr. Kissinger: I take it no decision is required on this until October.

Mr. Karamessines: That's right. Vang Pao has not served an ultimatum yet.

Mr. Johnson: Those people must be getting awfully tired.

Dr. Kissinger: Why is it that Hanoi doesn't get tired?

Mr. Johnson: We have never had an answer to that. You have to take your hats off to them.

Dr. Kissinger: I agree. It has been an extraordinary performance.

Mr. Packard: One reason is that the people in Hanoi are not suffering.

Gen. Knowles: This is a religion with them.

Dr. Kissinger: How many casualties do you think the North Vietnamese have suffered in North Laos?

Mr. Johnson: About 5,000 this dry season.

Mr. Packard: Our figure is 5,365.

Gen. Cushman: The ratio has been about 2 to 1 or 2.5 to 1. This is pretty rough for guerrillas.

Dr. Kissinger: Do you think there will be a full scale attack on Long Tieng this year?

Gen. Cushman: I think the odds are that there will be.

Mr. Karamessines: Vang Pao is convinced that his people will be attacked.

Dr. Kissinger: This time last year the North Vietnamese had sort of stopped.

Mr. Packard: They might be holding back waiting on the weather.

Mr. Johnson: So that we can't use our air.

Mr. Karamessines: The enemy is now using helicopters to bring in supplies.

Gen. Knowles: Why don't they shoot them down?

Mr. Nelson: They are flying in at 2:00 a.m.

Dr. Kissinger: Given what is ahead of us, I wonder whether the little group we put together to plan the Laotian operation could work out some of the choices we will face in North Laos and then report to the WSAG. If the Meos hold out, we could continue our present policy. If they don't last, we have the choice of trying to hold with the Thai and perhaps increasing Thai participation or of losing the Vientiane–Luangprabang axis. We need to determine what options we have if Vang Pao bugs out.

Mr. Johnson: Bill Sullivan is already working on this. We need to continue that study and put it before WSAG.⁵

Dr. Kissinger: That would be a useful thing to do.

Mr. Karamessines: (to Mr. Johnson) Could you put Tom Pickering on that group?

Mr. Johnson: Let me look into that.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Col. Kennedy) Let's get a WSAG together in a month or so.

Is there anything more on the paramilitary forces?

⁵ The report, which was included in a March 12 memorandum for the 40 Committee, recommended increasing funding from \$74.336 million in FY 1971 to \$75.038 million for FY 1972 for the Lao paramilitaries, noting that while they regularly lost territory during the dry season, they regained it during the rainy season and were the only indigenous force capable of carrying on sustained operations against enemy lines of communication and permitted the RLG to maintain its independence. (Ibid.)

Mr. Johnson: (to Gen. Cushman) You are asking for approval of the budget?

Gen. Cushman: Yes. It totals \$75,038,000.

Mr. Johnson: To show that we are exercising judgment we should change that from 38 to 37 thousand.

Dr. Kissinger: I have no basis for challenging that figure.

Mr. Johnson: Nor do I.

Mr. Packard: The only question is why it is being approved before it is submitted to Congress.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Southeast Asia.]

173. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Saigon, April 5, 1971, 1020Z.

12. Refs: A. WHS 1026.² B. WHS 1030.³ C. WHS 1031.⁴ D. WHS 1032.⁵

1. I had a very satisfactory talk with President Thieu at noon today.

2. I informed Thieu that the President would announce a further withdrawal of U.S. forces at 2100 EST Washington, April 7 (10:00 a.m.,

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 84, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. VI. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. A note indicates that it was sent to San Clemente.

² Document 170.

³ In backchannel message WHS 1030 to Bunker, April 3, Kissinger indicated that Nixon expressed interest in meeting with Thieu in July. Kissinger also advised Bunker that troop withdrawals would total 100,000 between May 1 and December 1 and that he should reassure Thieu that Nixon was willing to formally commit to a generous long-term economic assistance package and would maintain 200,000 troops through early October. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 84, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. VI)

⁴ In backchannel message WHS 1031 to Bunker, April 3, Kissinger instructed Bunker to inform Thieu that he should not share withdrawal figures because only Rogers knew about them in Washington. He added that it was the lowest figure possible "given political problems here." (Ibid.)

⁵ In backchannel message WHS 1032 to Bunker, April 4, Kissinger reported that Nixon promised to meet with Thieu but would withhold the announcement for a month for political reasons. (Ibid.)

April 8 Saigon time). I drew on contents of reftels to explain factors which had entered into the President's decision. I referred to the increasing political pressure from the Congress and from public opinion to bring about a speedier termination of American participation in the war, mentioning recent moves made in both the House and Senate.

3. I said that President Nixon has stood firm against these growing pressures. He is determined to achieve the goal upon which both our governments have agreed: the ability of the Government of South Vietnam to defend itself against aggression, and the right of its people to live under a government of their own choosing. In order to achieve this goal, it is absolutely essential for President Nixon to hold the support of U.S. public opinion so that the long-term U.S. assistance needed by South Vietnam will continue to be forthcoming. In order to do this, President Nixon has determined that it will be necessary to redeploy our troops at a somewhat faster rate than had been heretofore contemplated. He, therefore, plans to announce the redeployment of 100,000 U.S. troops from South Vietnam from May 1 to December 1, 1971.

4. I said that no one in the U.S. Government had been informed of this figure and it was, therefore, imperative that Thieu keep it exclusively to himself. If there should be any leak, it would create a most difficult situation.

5. I added that President Nixon recognized the need to retain a substantial number of troops through the October 3 presidential elections and that, therefore, 200,000 troops will remain in South Vietnam through that period. The heaviest withdrawals will be made during the latter part of October and November.

6. I then said that the President would like to arrange a meeting with President Thieu, but would not be in a position to make any announcement for a month. I emphasized it was essential, therefore, to maintain tight security on this.

I described a possible scenario for the meeting (ref A):

—It should be possible for Thieu to say at the time of the meeting that he had been assured by President Nixon that U.S. force levels will remain above 200,000 through early October.

—He might also say that he had informed President Nixon that ARVN forces would be prepared to take over the ground security of South Vietnam by 1 January 1972.

—President Nixon would also reaffirm his intention of providing necessary air support to South Vietnam for as long as necessary.

—President Nixon would be willing to assure Thieu of long-term economic aid.

7. Thieu raised no problem about the redeployment figure. He said "U.S. troop strength on December 1 will, therefore, be 184,000?" I affirmed that that was correct.

8. He made the following additional comments:

—He was very much pleased at the prospect of a meeting and said that he thought it would be most helpful. With regard to timing, he hoped the meeting could be in late June or early July. He believes that if the meeting should be held after he announces his candidacy he would be open to criticism. He feels it is perfectly in order for him to meet with President Nixon as President of South Vietnam, but questionable that he should do so as a candidate.

—He said that he felt that there were only three important subjects which would need discussion.

A. Long range economic support. He hoped by that time to have some concrete plans to suggest.

B. Acceleration of Vietnamization through strengthening of RVNAF with additional equipment. Lessons had been learned from Lam Son 719. We now know how the North Vietnamese are equipped, what kind of weapons they have, the manner in which they use them, and the kind of tactics they employ. There is no problem about RVNAF courage or morale. It is merely a question of having the right equipment. Thieu said many of their units had expressed regret that they had had no hand-to-hand combat.

C. Continuation of air support until the RVN Air Force attains adequate strength. Thieu said that with the combination of our air support and RVNAF troops we could always defeat the enemy.

9. At the time of the President's announcement, Thieu will make a brief statement saying that our governments have consulted in advance and that he agrees with the President's decision. It will be similar to the statement he made at the time the President made his redeployment announcement in April 1970.⁶

10. I was both pleased and relieved at Thieu's response. I feared that he might have difficulty with the increased withdrawals, but he interposed no problems, seemed confident and in good spirits.

11. Warmest regards.

⁶ On April 20, 1970, Nixon announced that he was withdrawing 150,000 troops by the spring of 1971. See *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pp. 373–377.

174. Editorial Note

On April 7, 1971, President Richard Nixon delivered a televised address from the Oval Office on the war in Southeast Asia. The President's principal purpose for the address was to announce his decision to increase the rate of United States troop withdrawals between May 1 and December 1, but as Henry Kissinger, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, noted in his memoirs, Nixon intended the address to quell Congressional and press attacks against his administration that had increased in the wake of the Laos operation. (*Ending the Vietnam War*, pages 206–208)

During the week leading up to the address, Nixon received recommendations on the number of troop withdrawals to announce. In an April 3 memorandum to the President, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird recommended that he announce the withdrawal of 105,000 by Christmas, which would reduce the U.S. force level to 179,000. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 103, Kissinger Office Files, Country Files, Far East, Vietnam, Troop Withdrawal II)

On April 3, at an unknown time, Laird and Kissinger spoke on the telephone. According to a transcript of their conversation, they had the following exchange about the memorandum:

"L[aird]: Say, did you get that memorandum all right.

"K[issinger]: I did. Thank you, and the President has got it and is studying it.

"L: Very good. Now, I kind of held that in line with what I thought you were working on.

"K: That's right.

"L: And didn't go overboard at all on it.

"K: Well, it's more than the military want, of course.

"L: Well, yeah, but the military . . . hell, they would want to bring it down to about 8,000 [troops per month], but they've always been about 20% . . . their recommendation has been 20% below the President's always. So it's about the same as you would expect. So I don't think we are too far off.

"K: Well the President has got it right in front of him now.

"L: Do you need any more material?

"K: No, I think, Mel, that this gives us . . . Frankly I don't know what he is going to pick and whether he is coming in on which of these three choices. But . . . or what length of time.

"L: The situation is such that he's got to at least go 12,500 [troops per month], and he could go a little more if he really wants to, Henry.

"K: Yeah, well, that's what your recommendation is.

“L: Yeah; well, I can see we could even go up to 15,000 [troops per month] if he really feels he has to.

“K: Well, I don’t think that that’s his mood. But I’ll tell him that.” (Ibid., Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 9, Chronological File)

On April 5, two days before Nixon’s address, he and Kissinger continued to make changes to the text. At 9:15 p.m., they spoke on the telephone and had the following exchange:

“K[issinger]: There is one thing, Mr. President, there are two sentences we ought to add because there is the cynical comment that the Doves are now making, especially McGovern, that we are substituting Asian for American casualties and increasing the bombing. We can do it in two sentences—One, where you speak about the reduction in American deaths, you can say, and South Vietnamese casualties have also dropped by I think 50%, I’ll get you the exact figures.

“P[resident]: And why don’t we say that our—then put in, and we’ve reduced our bombing by so much.

“K: And the bombing within South Vietnam has been reduced by 90%, Mr. President.”

After a continued exchange along the same lines, they concluded:

“P: Oh, of course, these goddamn Doves think just one thing. They eat you alive, they take one thing and then go after another one and hell, I’ve determined to just see it through and the hell with them.

“K: It’s the only—

“P: If it fails, it fails.

“K: Well, it’s a heroic posture, Mr. President.

“P: Well, hell, believe it or not, there is no other course for the country. These people—I mean, that’s why our domestic side while I’m interested in their views, why they’re irrelevant, they don’t know what the hell they are talking about.

“K: That’s right.” (Ibid.)

A collection of background material that the President used in preparing the speech is *ibid.*, Box 125, Vietnam Subject Files, President’s 4/7/71 Speech, Background Information.

In Nixon’s televised address, he contrasted the military situation in Southeast Asia when he left office in January 1961 as Vice President, when there were no U.S. combat forces or deaths in combat in Vietnam, to the situation when he was sworn in as President in January 1969, when there were 540,000 troops and 31,000 deaths. He noted that by May 1 he would have brought home more than 265,000 troops and reduced U.S. casualties by 5 times in the first 3 months of 1971 as compared to the same period in 1969. He credited these reductions to the success of his plan to train and equip the South Vietnamese, the de-

struction of enemy bases in Cambodia during the U.S. operation there in spring 1970, and the Laotian operation, of which he claimed he had just completed his assessment. In justifying his decision to increase the U.S. withdrawal rate, the President stated: "The day the South Vietnamese can take over their own defense is in sight. Our goal is a total withdrawal from Vietnam. We can and we will reach that goal through our program of Vietnamization if necessary." He posed the following questions to the U.S. public: "The issue very simply is this: Shall we leave Vietnam in a way that—by our own actions—consciously turns the country over to the Communists? Or shall we leave in a way that gives the South Vietnamese a reasonable chance to survive as a free people? My plan will end American involvement in a way that would provide that chance. And the other plan would end it precipitately and give victory to the Communists." The full text of Nixon's address is printed in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1971*, pages 522–527.

On April 9, the President sent a directive on the issues addressed the night before in a memorandum to Secretary of State William Rogers, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, and Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms: "Until further notice, I want no discussions by Government officials with the media concerning future U.S. troop withdrawal plans or U.S. plans for maintaining a residual force in South Vietnam. This applies to discussions with the press, either on or off the record, background briefings and informal speculation. I expect each of you to insure that this guidance is implemented throughout your Department/Agency." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 115, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam Troop Withdrawals, Vietnam Troop Redeployments)

The Consequences of Operation Lam Son 719 and the Search for a Settlement, April 8–October 6, 1971

175. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, April 9, 1971.

SUBJECT

Proposed Presidential Statement on Internment of POWs in a Neutral Country

At the April 8 Paris session, the GVN Ambassador proposed that able-bodied prisoners of war who have been held for an extended period of time be directly repatriated or interned in a neutral country. Ambassador Bruce strongly endorsed this GVN initiative.² In effect, this represents a new policy initiative by our side at Paris on the POW issue, since we have never before taken a stand on internment of able-bodied POWs.

I consider that this initiative is a positive step which will be well-received by U.S. and world opinion, especially by wives and families of our POWs. In order to gain maximum publicity for the initiative, I believe it would be useful for a statement to be issued in your name expressing your support for the internment proposal. A draft statement for your approval is at Tab A.³ It has been cleared by Ray Price.

Recommendation:

That you approve the issuance of the statement at Tab A in your name.⁴

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 121, Vietnam Subject Files, Viet (POW) Jan–Jun 71, Vol. II. Confidential. Sent for action. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen." Holdridge forwarded the memorandum to Kissinger under an April 9 covering memorandum, recommending that he sign it. He noted that the Department of State had prepared the draft statement at his request.

² Bruce's statement on April 8 is printed in the Department of State, *Bulletin*, April 26, 1971, p. 541.

³ Attached at Tab A but not printed is a draft statement with minor edits. The revised version was issued on April 14 and the text is printed *ibid.*, p. 568.

⁴ Nixon initialed his approval on April 12.

176. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, April 10, 1971.

SUBJECT

President Thieu's Efforts to Publicize Operation Lam Son

Ambassador Bunker has reported that President Thieu is taking personal and effective measures to put Operation Lam Son into favorable public perspective, and is clearly intent on keeping it in the public eye. President Thieu told Ambassador Bunker that so far he and his government have taken the following steps:

—President Thieu's press conference on March 31 in northern South Vietnam was well exploited on Vietnamese radio and television. He spent the next two days visiting troops which had been engaged in the operation, and found them in good spirits and proud of what they had accomplished.

—Troops are being given 100 piasters extra pay for each day they fought in Laos. Extra food allowances are being advanced to their families, some of whom have been flown to MR I to visit the wounded.

—Public demonstrations have been held in Saigon, Da Nang, and many provincial capitals to express support for the troops in Lam Son. More are being planned.

—Two of the more prominent Vietnamese political parties recently passed resolutions hailing the gallantry of the ARVN and supporting the men at the front.

Future plans. In addition, President Thieu outlined the following schedule to Ambassador Bunker:

—When Operation Lam Son is officially terminated, there will be a parade and ceremonies in Hue at which individual and unit citations will be awarded. When the units return to their home bases, there will be additional ceremonies which the public will attend.

—Vietnamese radio and television will present examples of the courage of the individual ARVN soldier.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 154, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 9 Apr 71–30 Apr 71. Secret; Nodis. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen." The memorandum summarizes telegram 4929 from Saigon, April 3, which was attached to an April 8 covering memorandum to Kissinger, in which Holdridge explained that he had summarized the telegram at Kissinger's request and recommended that he send it to Nixon. (Ibid.)

—Special recognition of the Laotian and Cambodian operations will be made on Armed Forces Day, June 19, when a large military parade will be held and ARVN achievements cited.

Comment. Ambassador Bunker also asked President Thieu about some of the private scepticism regarding official claims of results achieved, concern over ARVN casualties, and criticism of the tactics employed. Thieu replied that it was so, but that it was largely confined to a few oppositionists and did not affect the broad base of public support for the operation.

The only public opinion survey taken on the operation so far tends to support President Thieu's remarks. The survey indicated that 65 per cent of the population in the South Vietnamese countryside was aware of the operation. Of those aware, 83 percent considered it wise, and only three per cent thought it unwise. Continued publicity of the operation as outlined by President Thieu should certainly help maintain favorable public opinion.²

² Nixon highlighted the last three sentences and wrote "Good" in the margin.

177. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker)¹

Washington, April 12, 1971, 1734Z.

WHS 1037. Subject: The U.S. Impact of the Upcoming Elections in South Vietnam.

1. It is becoming evident that the next great public battle for which we will have to gear up is the forthcoming presidential election in South Vietnam.

2. There are already a number of proposals in the Congress for "insuring" that that election is fairly held. These are accompanied by demands that South Vietnam permit a large group of Congressmen to

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 853, For the President's Files, Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David, Vol. VII. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Smyser forwarded a draft of the message to Kissinger under an April 8 covering memorandum, recommending that he send it to Bunker. (*Ibid.*, Box 153, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 11 Feb 71–28 Mar 71)

travel around the countryside before and after the election, and that it permit another large group of staffers to be in South Vietnam for a period of several months before the elections.

3. One of the resolutions specifically states that all U.S. aid should be cut off if the elections are not “totally fair.”

4. Another proposal, started by Senator Stevenson, calls for Congressional observers to make certain that the U.S. does not support President Thieu in the election.²

5. It goes without saying that at least some of these Congressional groups will trumpet even the most minute suggestion of unfair play (such as the government having more loud-speakers than its opponents) and will try to claim that any support we give to any South Vietnamese program in the next six months is intended to help Thieu. Some will be fair, but others will not.

6. I hope you can discuss this with President Thieu and can suggest ways in which he can seize the initiative on these issues.

7. For example, he could announce that we would welcome international observers, and he might call for a delegation from the troop contributing countries, from the United Nations, or from the U.S. Congress. If his proposal is reasonable (suggesting, perhaps, that the delegation remain in Vietnam for a period of two weeks before and just after the election), we can probably get support for it here.

8. A good thought might be for the South Vietnamese Foreign Minister to issue the invitation to the TCC parliamentarians at the TCC meeting to be held in Washington later this month.

9. Another possibility would be for Thieu to announce in advance a cease-fire for a period of several days around the elections.

10. All this, of course, might have to be related to the new political initiative which we have discussed with President Thieu, but it need not wait until he has actually taken that initiative.

11. I would appreciate it if you could discuss this with President Thieu and let me know his thinking and yours.³

Warm regards.

² Senator Adlai Stevenson (D-IL) introduced a resolution on April 5 calling on Nixon to implement a policy of strict neutrality in the elections and create a commission of 10 U.S. Congressmen to oversee U.S. activities.

³ In backchannel message 229 from Saigon, Bunker told Kissinger that he expected even greater Congressional pressure for the October election than there had been for the 1967 election. He suggested that asking the GVN to hold a “‘totally fair’ election is asking something we have not achieved in the U.S. in two-hundred years,” but said that he would discuss the idea of inviting international observers with Thieu and believed that he would be amenable. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 853, For the President’s Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David Vol. VII)

178. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) and the U.S. Army Chief of Staff (Westmoreland)¹

Washington, April 12, 1971.

K: I have thought with nostalgia and regret of our conversation here many weeks ago. You were right.²

W: It's evident.

K: I was uneasy and didn't know what was wrong. I wish you had been wrong.

W: So do I. Formidable undertaking. So much depended on communications and helicopters.

K: I didn't realize they hadn't set up a headquarters for that.

W: They had two generals. Long and Than and then Dong who commands airborne. In retrospect we should have _____.

K: Sent one of our guys up.

W: A 4-star on the scene.

K: We came close. The other side wasn't _____.

W: The operation was still successful. Our losses were heavier than might have been. Our materiel losses are shocking.

K: In helicopters?

W: That is public knowledge but 94 artillery pieces and tanks and APC.

K: I haven't seen it.

W: Not revealed and shouldn't be. It gives you a better idea of what happened. The personnel involved—you left the room. Dong I have no confidence in. The man you named earlier thought Louad fell flat on his face. He was relieved after Tet.

K: How did they think with these guys it could be done.

W: They have come a long way and learned as time has gone on. Give more credit than for running something as complicated as this. We would have been hard pressed to run it ourselves and too much for these little fellows.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 9, Chronological File. No classification marking. All omissions are in the original. A typed note on the transcript indicates the conversation occurred in the afternoon.

² Apparent reference to the Lam Son operation.

K: I remember the briefing you gave to the WSAG a few months ago. If this war doesn't ruin you, it breaks your heart.

W: It's been an unhappy national experience. In retrospect—hind sight is always 20–20.

K: You had Atapu [*Attopeu*] pointed.

W: These things have to be planned in advance. We should have pulled advisors before to shake them down so they would have self-confidence. We should have stockpiled airborne _____. They take terrible casualties. We should be able to replace them. Build up 120% over-strike. These things have to be anticipated. Insufficient attention given to control of airspace where you have _____ on the ground. Complicated problems. If we do it over again these things will be thought through. Such a veil of secrecy Abe was afraid to take steps to _____ it. Too much secrecy in the plan.

K: And not adjusting it to conditions when we hit them.

W: _____ Not fully appreciate it puts a veil of caution on the whole thing. The operation was successful. Know advisors morale effect.

K: Only reports when it was going on.

W: It was like Tet offensive in that regard. Materiel losses when you see that it was most indicative thing on disorderliness and withdrawal (?).

K: I will get it from Haig.

[Omitted here is conversation unrelated to Vietnam.]

[W:] One postscript remark. Abe in the most difficult position you can hear of. Thieu took it over. Americans were taken out because Thieu talked to the field commanders. On one occasion we talked Thieu into a course of action and orders sent to L_____ who talks with Thieu and reverses it. It's awkward. You have to fully appreciate the position that Abe was in.

K: No problem with Abe. It's a problem of you cannot say you learned from this experience because there will be no other one. I meant to call and tell you that your briefing at the end of Feb. was very clairvoyant.

W: Thank you for calling.

179. Minutes of a Meeting of the Senior Review Group¹

Washington, April 13, 1971, 3:09–4 p.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	JCS
State	Admiral Thomas H. Moorer
Under Secretary John N. Irwin	Lt. Gen. John W. Vogt
Under Secretary U. Alexis Johnson	OMB
Ambassador William Sullivan	Mr. James Schlesinger
Mr. Arthur Hartman	NSC Staff
Mr. Ron Spiers	Mr. K. Wayne Smith
Defense	Col. Richard T. Kennedy*
Mr. Dennis Doolin	Mr. John H. Holdridge
Major Gen. Fred Karhos	Mr. W. R. Smyser
CIA	Mr. Robert L. Sansom*
Mr. Richard Helms	Mr. Keith Guthrie
Mr. George Carver	
Mr. Paul Walsh	

*Not present at the beginning of the meeting.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

The Senior Review Group discussed the results of the studies prepared to assess enemy military capabilities in 1971 and 1972 and considered the requirements for further studies to provide a comprehensive analysis of the situation which the U.S. will face in Vietnam in 1971 and 1972. It was agreed that the following studies would be prepared, with drafting responsibilities and deadlines to be coordinated subsequently with the agencies concerned:²

1. Analysis of enemy strategy alternatives in terms of logistics and manpower requirements, and the control situation and main force balance in each MR. (CIA for logistics and manpower analysis; Defense for MR control and main force analysis—April 26)

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-112, SRG Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Nodis. All brackets are in the original.

² Due dates and primary agency drafting responsibilities given in parentheses following each item are as proposed to Dr. Kissinger by the NSC staff following the SRG meeting. In addition to the studies mentioned at the SRG meeting, the two following studies are also planned as part of the assessment of the situation in 1971–72: (1) Update of cease-fire study (Vietnam Special Studies Working Group, May 14); (2) Economic stabilization projection through mid-1972 (Vietnam Special Studies Working Group, May 16). [Footnote in the original.]

2. Projected friendly main force surpluses or deficits by MR and countrywide against alternative enemy strategies. (Defense—April 26)
3. Improvement of the RVNAF. (Defense—May 3)
4. Role of the TCCs, especially continued utilization of Korean forces. (Vietnam Ad Hoc Group—April 26)
5. Residual U.S. forces, including advisory personnel, in Vietnam. (Defense—May 14)
6. Air interdiction options. (Defense—May 14)
7. Economic development prospects for South Vietnam. (Vietnam Special Studies Working Group and AID—to be submitted as soon as work already underway is completed)
8. Effectiveness of police and anti-VCI program in Vietnam. (Vietnam Ad Hoc Group—May 14)
9. Political situation in South Vietnam. (Vietnam Ad Hoc Group—May 3)
10. Prospects for regional cooperation among non-communist Southeast Asian nations. (Vietnam Ad Hoc Group—May 3)
11. North Vietnam's potential to continue the war. (CIA—May 14)
12. Projected military situation in Cambodia. (Defense—May 14)

Dr. Kissinger: First, why don't we have a ten minute summary of the paper that CIA has distributed?³

Mr. Walsh: We have prepared some tables, the meaning of which will become a little clearer as I proceed.

(Mr. Walsh distributed the tables. A copy is attached to these minutes.)⁴

I would briefly like to give the gist of the study which we submitted on April 2. This was a joint DIA/CIA effort. The purpose was to assess the logistical and manpower considerations that might affect Hanoi's options over the next few months. We considered both the quantifiable and non-quantifiable factors. We analyzed the logistical and manpower resources that the enemy would have to commit in South Vietnam and Cambodia in order to carry out five different strategies. The strategy with the lowest requirements would be one of protracted warfare. The highest requirements would be for a sustained offensive throughout South Vietnam and Cambodia. We considered three

³ An Intelligence Memorandum entitled, "NVA/VC Military Activities," April 2, prepared jointly by CIA and DIA. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 153, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 29 Mar 71–8 Apr 71)

⁴ Attached but not printed are table 1, "Logistic Factors for Alternative Strategies," and table 2, "Incremental Combat Forces and Infiltration Required for Alternative Offensive Strategies."

intermediate strategies: an offensive campaign confined to MR 1, to Cambodia, or to both MR 1 and Cambodia.

Let me explain how we considered the logistical problem. There were three steps in our methodology. The first was to calculate the volume of supplies that would have to be consumed or stockpiled over a period of one year for each of the postulated strategies. The second step was to translate these calculations into input requirements, that is, the amount of supplies that would have to be brought overland from North Vietnam to Laos. Thirdly, having determined input requirements, we then compared them with the performance of the system during the current dry season. All of this is set forth in Table 1.

Admiral Moorer: Did you assume that stockpiles would be raised up to the same level as when the enemy started [this year's operations]?

Mr. Walsh: The concept was that the enemy would build up his stockpiles. We estimated they would aim for about 1-1/2 times the amount of planned consumption. Such a calculation would be compatible with what we know about the enemy logistical doctrine and would be consistent with what they have previously had in their stockpiles.

Mr. Sullivan: Could you please explain these tables a little more?

Mr. Walsh: The first line shows the enemy supply requirements to carry out protracted warfare in 1970 for South Laos, South Vietnam, and Cambodia. This is in terms of how many tons of supplies would have to get through [to these areas]. Our estimate is that this would amount to 278 tons per day. This is all the North Vietnamese could move if a dry season of eight months duration is assumed.

Next we have the estimated enemy [logistical] performance. We give high and low estimates, which range from 295 to 370 tons per day. The name of the game is to compare these figures [requirements vs. performance] in order to see if the system can carry the burden.

Mr. Schlesinger: If the performance is on the high side of the range, they can do everything.

Mr. Walsh: Yes, although we would fudge a bit on the likelihood of their carrying out the high strategy. Although the figures indicate that they could undertake such a strategy, we estimate that they won't try it.

For manpower, we have used the 1968 offensive as a base and then figured what would be required to build up to that level in South Vietnam and Cambodia. We have then adjusted the figures to take into account likely casualties and have come up with a net figure on the amount of infiltration that would be required.

The results of our logistical analysis shows that for the low option, an input of 278 tons per day would be required. For the maximum option, the requirement would be 332–364 tons per day, and for the intermediate options, 293–347 tons per day.

Admiral Moorer: What percentage of this input gets to the consumer?

Dr. Kissinger: This analysis makes allowance for what gets lost along the way.

Mr. Walsh: Assuming present levels of air interdiction.

Dr. Kissinger: Your analysis also assumes that there will be no new Lam Son.

Mr. Walsh: That's right.

(Col. Kennedy joined the meeting at this point.)

If we take the midpoint estimate of enemy logistical capability, all of the options except Option 1 [countrywide offensive] should be feasible in the 1971–72 dry season. If one estimates enemy logistical capabilities toward the low end of the range, Strategy 1 would not be possible at all, and strategies 2–4 would not be feasible until late in the dry season, with exception of a MR 1 offensive, which could be undertaken earlier because of the proximity of the region to North Vietnam. If one gives an estimate close to the high end of the range, all of the strategy options would be possible for the enemy. However, he would probably want to make sure all of the required supplies were in place and would therefore wait until the following dry season to launch such an attack.

Dr. Kissinger: At what point could any of these offensives be started? Would it be possible on the first day of the dry season?

Mr. Walsh: You can't slice the estimates that thin. They could probably undertake an offensive in MR 1 rather early in the dry season. The other strategies might not be possible until well into the dry season.

As for manpower, our estimates indicate that 20,000 troops would be required for an offensive in MR 1, 40,000 for a combined offensive in both MR 1 and Cambodia, and 60,000 for a countrywide offensive.

(Mr. Sansom joined the meeting at this point)

Mr. Walsh: These manpower requirements correspond to annual infiltration requirements ranging from 120,000 to 250–300,000 men annually.

Mr. Schlesinger: Why aren't the infiltration figures additive?

Mr. Walsh: To give an example, in the case of an offensive only in Cambodia, the enemy would be holding his troop levels in South Vietnam to the existing levels.

Mr. Schlesinger: But they still should be additive for the increments of infiltration.

Mr. Walsh: Some analyst judgments are involved in setting these figures.

Mr. Sullivan: Probably this assumes that more support forces are needed in Cambodia.

Mr. Walsh: No. Most of the support forces are already pretty much in position.

Mr. Sullivan: Are these figures on an annual basis or do they refer only to the dry season?

Mr. Walsh: They are for a twelve month period, probably starting at the beginning of the dry season.

Dr. Kissinger: As I understand it, you say that the enemy can carry out only one of these [strategic options] early in the dry season. In other words, they can carry out an offensive in MR 1 at any time. However, for the others, they would first need to build up their stockpiles.

Mr. Walsh: Building up stockpiles is required for all strategies, but it could be accomplished more rapidly in MR 1 because of the proximity to North Vietnam.

Dr. Kissinger: Can you put a month on it [any of these strategies]?

Mr. Walsh: We haven't done so. We estimate that a combined offensive in both MR 1 and Cambodia could not take place until late in the dry season.

Dr. Kissinger: The controlling factor is Cambodia, since they can carry out an MR 1 offensive at any time.

Mr. Walsh: That's right.

Dr. Kissinger: Therefore, if there is going to be a Cambodia offensive, it would be late in the dry season.

Mr. Walsh: That is what we think.

Dr. Kissinger: Does late in the dry season mean February or March?

Mr. Walsh: Strategy 1 would not be possible until late in the dry season, that is, possibly April or May. However, for other reasons we feel that this is not the option they will try.

Dr. Kissinger: Then take Case 2 [offensive in Cambodia].

Mr. Walsh: This would be pretty tight for them if they were performing at the low end of their estimated capability.

Dr. Kissinger: But they could do it anytime.

Mr. Walsh: Yes, even with the capability in the low range. However, if the input rate were 370 tons per day they could do it earlier.

Dr. Kissinger: Then you would put this as likely to happen in the middle of the dry season. I am not trying to get a date with a view to holding you to it. All I want is some sense of the timing.

Mr. Walsh: I would say the middle of the dry season in this case.

Mr. Irwin: In your calculations for 1970–71 were you estimating what the enemy would have to do?

Mr. Walsh: We are estimating what he will have done [by the end of the dry season].

Mr. Irwin: Do you estimate that he will do the same thing next dry season?

Mr. Walsh: We are using that [the 1970–71 estimate] as a base for our calculations for the dry season but making adjustments to take account of new factors.

Mr. Sullivan: This infiltration will not have to be accomplished this dry season?

Mr. Walsh: That's right. The spread of 250–300,000 in the infiltration requirements for Case 1 is designed to take care of a number of contingencies which might cause the enemy to require more manpower.

Dr. Kissinger: As I understand, you ignored Lam Son altogether in making these calculations. Have you calculated what they can accomplish during the remainder of this dry season or what they will consume?

Mr. Walsh: On the question of stockpiles, we had a little divergence in views. They could move some supplies through during this period.

Dr. Kissinger: Your last paper assessing Lam Son contained a number of assumptions which gave all the breaks to the enemy.⁵ You estimated that the bomb damage rate would be no greater. This appears to be a conservative assumption in view of the increase in gunship effectiveness. You estimated they would maintain 10,000 additional personnel in Laos instead of the 20,000 you cited in your previous estimate. The point is that there were a number of assumptions that if changed would reduce our estimate of enemy capabilities. However, I take it that changing these assumptions would not affect the conclusions of the study.

Mr. Walsh: No, it would not. Lam Son becomes significant only if we assume there would be another Lam Son next year. Another Lam Son would make it probable they would not be able to undertake Strategy 4 [combined MR 1/Cambodia offensive].

Dr. Kissinger: Let me sum up, in order to see if we all agree on what I get out of the paper. First, you consider it improbable that the enemy can mount an all-South-Vietnam-Cambodia offensive before the very end of the dry season.

Mr. Walsh: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: You also conclude that an offensive in MR 1 is possible at any time, but that they probably won't make the effort.

Mr. Walsh: That's right.

Dr. Kissinger: As for Cases 2–4, depending on the estimated input and the scale on which the enemy is operating, the timing of these operations could move toward the end of the dry season.

⁵ For a summary of the paper, see Document 166.

Mr. Walsh: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: The necessary infiltration would have to be accomplished by the beginning of any operation. Thus, we would have some indication of what was coming.

Mr. Walsh: A year ago I would have said yes. However, I am not sure that we would pick up any indication of increased infiltration.

Dr. Kissinger: If we had the ability to pick it up, this would tip us off that something was afoot.

All right. This gives us a pretty good idea of what we have ahead of us. It suggests that the time to resign is before January.

Admiral Moorer: (to Mr. Walsh) Your analysis doesn't take into account what is happening with the interdiction effort. It is more effective now than it has ever been, but this isn't taken into account.

Mr. Walsh: We do consider this. Admittedly, our estimate [of bomb damage] is conservative. Two years ago we made a study of the interdiction program and found that it was necessary to discount reported truck kills. We then thought that a reasonable bomb damage assessment figure would be about 10–15 percent. However, it was the general judgment that this figure should be raised to 25 percent. Now with the new gunships there may be reason to raise the figure, but we haven't decided on a percent.

Admiral Moorer: Then you are assuming the same loss as in your previous analysis?

Mr. Walsh: I don't know.

Dr. Kissinger: If the Air Force is claiming 3700 kills—

Gen. Vogt: The figure is 9,000.

Dr. Kissinger: If they are claiming 8,000 kills against 4300 last year, then one can say that whatever the actual number is, it still amounts to only 25 percent [of total tonnage passing down the trail] because there has been an increase in input. Or one can say that the figure is so unreliable that it cannot be used even to establish a proportion. Without tying you to numbers, is it possible to get some estimate on this?

Mr. Walsh: I do not have any particular feeling that the Air Force figures are either more or less reliable this year. I do have a strong feeling that 25 percent is a pretty good bomb damage estimate.

Dr. Kissinger: But you can use Air Force claims to establish a proportion.

Mr. Walsh: We are not ready to do that yet.

Dr. Kissinger: You are not ready to make an increase in the proportion of tonnage destroyed.

Gen. Vogt: The Air Force figures are evaluated.

Admiral Moorer: Let me show you some pictures we took of the Kissinger Trail.

Dr. Kissinger: You mean Route 914.

Admiral Moorer: Yes.

(Shows aerial photographs to Dr. Kissinger.)

You can see where there are trucks spread along the trail every few yards. We didn't have this kind of concentration last year. That 25 percent figure couldn't be right for both years.

Mr. Samson: The 25 percent could be right for both years if the total input had increased.

Dr. Kissinger: If the input was *much* greater. (to Mr. Walsh) You think it was about the same.

Mr. Walsh: We think it was up about 15 percent. If I can restate our argument, when we began to use the 25 percent figure we thought it was generous. We are still using 25 percent, but now it has become a conservative estimate.

Dr. Kissinger: Supposing the figure were 30 percent, how would that affect your conclusion?

Mr. Walsh: I would have to go through and calculate that again. However, it would mean a tight situation would be a little tighter. It would not affect the high option.

Dr. Kissinger: An increase of five percent would amount to 20 tons per day.

Mr. Irwin: This figure is the best judgment of the intelligence community without any relation to claimed kills this year versus last year.

Dr. Kissinger: All I say is what Tom [Moorer] says: that if it is claimed that a larger number of trucks have been killed, the [BDA] percentage ought to be increased proportionally to the increase in truck kills less the increase in input.

Mr. Walsh: Since Gen. Bennett is not here, I hesitate to speak for him. However, I think he would tell you that the BDA figure is closer to 40 percent. Nevertheless, his analysis enables him to come to the same conclusions that we reached.

Dr. Kissinger: No analyst ever gets in trouble predicting a calamity.

A five percent differential either way amounts to 20 tons per day. If they were building up for an offensive, this differential would have more effect at the end than at the beginning of the dry season.

Mr. Walsh: It would if you regard these figures as a concrete thing. However, they aren't. If you treat the figures this way you would also have to figure what the enemy is going to do during the next rainy season. He could put some supplies through at that time. This would probably wash out any increase in the BDA figure. No single figure is

so valid that one could say that the conclusions would change after the statistics changed by five percent.

Dr. Kissinger: Of course, you also assume that the enemy would maintain the same forces in Laos. However, they won't do that if Lam Son is not credible.

Mr. Walsh: We looked at that. If the threat of another Lam Son is credible, they might keep 100,000 troops there; however, they would never keep 40,000.

Dr. Kissinger: But they might keep 60–80,000.

Mr. Walsh: Yes, although they could redeploy them to North Vietnam where supply would be less of a problem.

Mr. Schlesinger: With regard to the force ratios for the MRs, the ratio is inversely proportional to the difficulty of the situation in each MR.

Mr. Walsh: When one starts talking about levels of infiltration that are required in order to carry out certain military activities, a great many subjective judgments are involved. You have to consider how long it would take to get troops in place and what level of control the enemy has over the territory. To my mind these infiltration figures are much softer than the logistical figures. However, they do square with what we know about the 1968 offensive.

Dr. Kissinger: The major reason for this meeting was to see how we could use this estimate (recognizing that the recommendations drawn from it have to be tentative) for our future planning. The President wants us to work out coherent programs for the rest of this year and for next year so that we will not slide into crisis situations that we haven't foreseen. We need to consider what we would like to discuss and then get a work program established. Today we reviewed enemy capabilities, but we haven't considered the strategies that may follow from these capabilities. We need to have some discussion of the most probable enemy strategies and what we need to do to deal with them. This should be related to the situations that we will find in the MRs, as indicated by the analysis that has already been done.

Then we need to consider what can be done now to improve the situation in these MRs before the dry season.

We have already asked Defense to prepare a study of what Vietnamization will entail, including force requirements. (Maybe we can get Joe Alsop off our back on the question of helicopters.) We need to know what is expected from the Vietnamization program and why we should believe that the South Vietnamese, with 100,000 fewer U.S. troops and one fifth the helicopters that the U.S. forces have, can do the same thing that we are now doing.

We also need some projection of TCC participation independent of fiscal restraints. It isn't self-evident why the ROK forces have to come out next year and why their removal wouldn't put a strain on the South Vietnamese.⁶ I am not trying to pre-judge the conclusion. I just want to make sure that we look into these questions.

There is one other point related to military programs. We have heard a great deal about residual and advisory forces. Some of the most intense negotiations now being carried on are those we are conducting among ourselves on this subject. We need an analysis of just what residual, and particularly MAAG, presence is to be left behind. What would be the size of the force? How would it function?

Mr. Johnson: Aren't you putting air support on the agenda?

Dr. Kissinger: Yes. We need to look at the air interdiction program. We also want to look at the economic development program in order to determine what economic assistance South Vietnam will need over a two to three year period.

We should look at what other fixes might be needed within South Vietnam; for example, improvements in internal security and support for the police.

We also need an analysis of the political situation in general. This applies to the political situation in Vietnam. We are assuming that there will be no negotiations.

The President wants this group to meet once a week until this work is completed. He wants to have a picture of where we are heading.

I wonder if instead of kicking this around today in the abstract, we might just give out some assignments, and then our offices can be in touch to work out the details of what is to be done and when it is to be submitted.

For example, the projection of probable enemy strategies might be undertaken by CIA, working in coordination with other agencies, of course. Defense could do the analysis of the military situation in the MRs, including likely force surpluses and deficits. State might be involved in a study on the general situation in Cambodia. (to Mr. Doolin) As I understand, you are thinking of sending a group out there.

Mr. Doolin: The paper [proposing this] is going to Secretary Laird this afternoon.

⁶ In a February 24 memorandum to Kissinger, Eliot informed him that the Republic of Korea announced it would remove two divisions and a marine brigade from South Vietnam. K. Wayne Smith wrote to Kissinger in an April 26 memorandum that even though the Korean troop performance had been disappointing, the loss of those troops would nonetheless produce a significant gap in the allied force structure. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-57, SRG Meetings, Vietnam Assessment 4-27-71 (2 of 3))

Dr. Kissinger: We are getting a paper from Defense about the questions we raised on RVNAF modernization. We are getting a paper on air interdiction from the JCS.

(to Ambassador Sullivan) Bill, we need from your group a paper on the political situation in South Vietnam and one on the police and anti-VCI programs.

(to Mr. Smith) The economic study is under way.

Mr. Smith: It is being done in the VSSG Working Group.

Dr. Kissinger: Also from Bill Sullivan's group we might have a paper on what measures of regional cooperation may be under way.

I would like to set up due dates in cooperation with your offices. This group can meet once a week to review the papers as they are prepared. We need to look into all of these questions. We do not want to risk the nightmare of having the situation in Vietnam come apart under the impact of continued U.S. withdrawals.

Mr. Irwin: What about the question of Thai involvement?

Mr. Doolin: That is part of the TCC question. That subject will be taken care of by Bill's [Sullivan's] group too.

Dr. Kissinger: We also need an analysis, which CIA might prepare, on Hanoi's potential for continuing the war. Maybe CIA will conclude that the North Vietnamese can't continue, and then we won't have to worry about these other questions.

Ambassador Sullivan: What about the POW issue?

Dr. Kissinger: I want to leave that for separate handling. All of this study effort assumes the war will still be going on in 1972. It is directed against a possible catastrophe then.

Mr. Irwin: All of this pretty much omits North Laos.

Dr. Kissinger: I don't think we need to put that in this package.

Ambassador Sullivan: Is any study being done on the span of attention or support we can obtain from Congress for these programs?

Dr. Kissinger: Do we have any experts on that?

Mr. Sansom: We could use the same methodology [used to analyze enemy intentions].

Dr. Kissinger: Probably the easiest thing to get done for next week would be some of the intelligence work. However, we won't settle that now. We will distribute a suggested schedule and list of assignments. This is not intended to be exhaustive; additions can be suggested. The President gives this effort top priority. He wants this group to run the project with an iron hand.

180. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker)¹

Washington, April 13, 1971, 1539Z.

WHS 1038. We plan to approach other side soon to reopen special Paris forum. They indicated interest through Dobrynin here before latter returned to Moscow for Party Congress.² However, we plan usual direct contact and do not envisage going through Soviet Union.

If they agree to resume talks our thinking is to table a concrete package, say that we want to know promptly if genuine negotiations are possible, and indicate that time for negotiated settlement is in fact running out. We envisage a package proposal along the lines that Haig discussed with you on March trip.³

I would appreciate your personal views in this channel on the following:

—What should be in the package, including possible new elements.

—How do we handle Thieu, including his likely reaction to the proposals.

You indicated to Haig that we should test other side's reaction before informing Thieu. This has obvious advantages and avoids possible problems such as shaking Thieu's morale when there are real doubts that the other side will negotiate seriously. On the other hand, failure to take Thieu into our confidence from the outset also has clearcut pitfalls for our bilateral relationship. If we do go to him in advance how much detail should we give him? Do we seek his concurrence or do we in effect tell him what we are going to do in any event? How do you envisage the scenario, including early summer meeting between the two Presidents and South Vietnam's October election?

Warm regards.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Cables, 10/69–12/31/71. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. In an April 12 memorandum to Kissinger, Lord wrote the following: "I know I am preaching to the converted when I say now is the time for an all-out effort for a negotiated settlement in Indochina." He recommended contacting Bunker to get his opinion on how to deal with Thieu. (Ibid., Box 853, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David, Vol. VII)

² See Document 165.

³ See Document 151.

181. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, April 14, 1971.

SUBJECT

New South Vietnamese Operation

The South Vietnamese have initiated a new operation designed to keep enemy forces in southern Laos and the border area off balance and disrupt enemy supply operations.² The operation will involve up to 11 ARVN maneuver battalions with US artillery and air support. The initial phase of the operation began last evening with a two battalion force landing near Ashau with the objective of making a feint toward Base Area 607 (see attached map).³ As of 9 a.m. this morning no contact with the enemy had been reported.

The next phase will begin on Monday, April 19, with units landing in selected objective areas in the Da Krong River–Northern Ashau Valley area in South Vietnam near Base Area 611. As the situation develops random battalion size raids will be conducted into enemy Base Area 611 in Laos.⁴

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 154, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 9 Apr 71–30 Apr 71. Top Secret. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² Haig informed Kissinger of the operation in an April 13 memorandum in which he noted that Souvanna had asked the RVNAF to undertake a smaller operation in the tri-border area east of Attopeu and Bowley. (Ibid., Box 84, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations File, Vol. VI)

³ Not printed.

⁴ According to a transcript of a telephone conversation between Nixon and Haig at 9:30 a.m., April 29, the President inquired whether the operation was primarily South Vietnamese and asked for a status report. Haig responded that "there are some U.S. 101st Airborne with them" and that the RVNAF had not yet encountered any resistance. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 998, Haig Chronological Files, Haig Telcons 1971, 2 of 2)

182. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, April 16, 1971.

SUBJECT

Lam Son 719 Final Report

<i>Laos (Lam Son 719)</i>	<i>Cumulative Totals</i>
Individual weapons	5,100
Crew-served weapons	2,000
Small arms ammunition (rounds)	580,600
Other assorted ammo (pounds)	40,002,200
Food (pounds)	2,565,000
Vehicles	530
Tanks	80
Petroleum (gallons)	218,000
Structures destroyed	1,300
Bunkers destroyed	1,330
Medical supplies (pounds)	8,000
Miscellaneous equipment & supplies (pounds)	80,000
Enemy KIA	13,650 includes 4,400 KBA
U.S. KIA	180
ARVN KIA	1,550

In a final report on Operation Lam Son 719, MACV makes the following observations on the effects of the operation:

—The enemy's aggressive reaction caused his forces to mass and they were thus exposed to Allied ground and air fire power.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 82, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam Operations in Laos and Cambodia, Vol. V. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen." Fazio forwarded it to Kissinger under an April 14 covering memorandum, indicating that he modified the original report from the Situation Room by rounding out the statistics as Kissinger instructed.

—The operation has shown the enemy that his sanctuaries are vulnerable. Thus, an offshoot of the operation will be fixing of significant enemy forces.

—Fixing the enemy forces will assist in keeping them distant from the population of South Vietnam.

—If there were any who still believed that this was a South Vietnamese “civil war”, the reports and pictures of the elaborate network of roads, trails and streams that link enemy activity from North Vietnam to the RVN should expose that fiction.

—Detailed ground reconnaissance developed many lucrative target locations during the operation. This information is being used to refine the accuracy of continued air strikes against the enemy’s logistic system in Laos.

—The experience gained in command and control of large combat formations, coordination of combined arms efforts and logistical support of large-scale operations will enhance RVNAF combat effectiveness.

—The operation has underlined the progress which has been made in Vietnamization.

—Lam Son 719 may be over for the RVNAF, but for the enemy it is still going on as B-52s, tac air and gunships continue to attack targets developed during February and March.

—The operation appears to have widespread popular support in RVN.

—Although Lam Son 719 was an important operation, it was only part of the total effort designed to disrupt the entire enemy system. Understandably, the total effect of this operation is difficult to quantify completely at this time, and all the results will not be known for many months.

—Although it is too early to make a final judgment, Lam Son 719 may well prove to have been a pivotal point in the Indochina conflict.²

² On April 15, John S. Foster, Director of the Office of Research and Engineering, sent Laird an April 14 memorandum, prepared in his office, that reached a different conclusion: “Based on Lamson 719 data available, it is unlikely that the South Vietnamese will ever be able to *cut off* Laotian infiltration on their own—at least if they try to use the operational techniques of this campaign.” (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330-76-197, Box 69, Laos 381 April)

183. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, April 17, 1971.

SUBJECT

Hanoi's Reaction to the Ping Pong Visit

We have received several indications that Hanoi is unhappy about the Chinese invitation to a U.S. ping pong team.²

—North Vietnamese diplomats boycotted the ping pong matches although they were invited to attend the matches along with other diplomats. They made it clear that their attendance was caused by displeasure at the event.

—Soviet diplomats have told the British that the North Vietnamese were “extremely upset” and have told the Chinese this.

—Hanoi media have not reported the ping pong visit.

There are probably two reasons for Hanoi's displeasure.

—First, Hanoi must be concerned about any relaxation of tensions between the U.S. and its Communist allies.

—Second, and more fundamental, Hanoi may fear that this move could represent a shift in Chinese policy from confrontation to negotiation. Such a shift could bring the kind of pressures on Hanoi which led the North Vietnamese to agree to the unsatisfactory 1954 Geneva Accords and compelled them for several years to comply with at least some portions of those Accords.

The North Vietnamese must interpret the ping pong move as a sign that China is prepared to improve relations with the U.S. although no progress is evident in getting the U.S. disengaged from the “civil war” between Taipei and Peking, and although the U.S. is still protecting Taiwan. This interpretation must weigh heavily on Hanoi's mind, since it may mean that the Chinese would suggest that North Vietnam follow an analogous policy. It could also mean that the Chi-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 154, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 9 Apr 71–30 Apr 71. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, “The President has seen.” Smyser forwarded it to Kissinger under an April 16 covering memorandum, indicating that he had prepared it at Kissinger's request.

² On April 6, the People's Republic of China made a surprise offer to the U.S. ping pong team, which was competing in Japan, to travel to China for a series of matches, launching what was later termed “ping-pong diplomacy.”

nese may not be prepared to jeopardize their own interests in order to support Hanoi's.

This has the following implications for our analysis of North Vietnam:

—I do not think that the North Vietnamese are in a state of alarm, since their position now is stronger than it was in 1954. But they must still be quite concerned.

—They may feel that their negotiating position is not quite as safe as before, and may want to adjust slightly. We have no indications that they are ready to give up fundamental demands, but they may be ready to be somewhat more forthcoming.

184. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Saigon, April 17, 1971, 1210Z.

270. Ref: WHS-1038.²

1. I assume special Paris forum refers to talks between you and Yul.

2. I think we should inform Thieu in advance that we have had an indication of interest of the other side in resuming private contact and that you propose to meet very secretly to determine whether there is any serious interest now in negotiations with or without a cease-fire. We would say that, as always, we will inform him promptly of results of meeting. This would conform to precedent already established and will avoid any elements of suspicion which post-disclosure might generate.

3. It seems to me that the aim of this first meeting should be exclusively to establish whether Hanoi is interested in negotiations or not. Depending on the outcome, we can then determine whether to table a package at the next meeting. To surface proposal now so soon after Lam Son 719, in which RVNAF took heavy losses, followed by acceleration of our withdrawal, could shake Thieu's confidence in

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 85, Vietnam Subject Files, Special Operations March 70 on. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only.

² Document 180.

credibility of our support at time when it is most important that it remain solid. Moreover it would be subject to misunderstanding by the other side. As RVNAF demonstrates its strength, resilience, and recuperative powers, as it is already beginning to do, confidence will increase and Thieu (and the GVN) will prove receptive to proposal.

4. I would envisage scenario along the following lines:

A) At first meeting we should say that we intend to continue to reduce our forces during 1971 and 1972. All our forces will be out of ground combat during 1971. Air and logistic support will continue thereafter until the South Vietnamese air and logistic forces are fully ready to assume these responsibilities.

B) The South Vietnamese military forces, regular and territorial, number 1.1 million men. They are professionally led and combat hardened. They are supported by 1.5 million members of the Peoples' Self-Defense Force who have been combat trained. These forces cannot be defeated in the field even after our forces leaves Viet-Nam. In accordance with the Nixon Doctrine, we intend to supply South Vietnamese military forces with all essential military equipment indefinitely.

C) The South Vietnamese economy is solidly based and economic improvement will continue to be made. We intend to maintain economic support of the economy as long as it is necessary. As our troops leave and dollar earnings fall, we will make up the loss with more economic aid so as to maintain a high and steady level of economic support. There will be no collapse of the economy.

D) In Cambodia and Laos, we intend to continue to supply economic and military aid indefinitely. The Cambodian forces have greatly expanded and improved during the past year and will further expand and improve in the coming years. The South Vietnamese will continue to give Cambodia support in the form of training and cross-border operations.

E) We are prepared to withdraw all our forces from Viet-Nam if there is a negotiated settlement for Indo-China and a return of our prisoners, and to provide a timetable. If there is no negotiated settlement, then we will reduce to a minimum force and maintain it indefinitely.

F) In South Viet-Nam—indeed in Cambodia and Laos, as well—there is a real desire for peace and a negotiated settlement on the part of the people, the main organized groups and the government. In the absence of a negotiated settlement the great majority of people believe there is no alternative except to continue to fight. If there is no negotiated settlement the prospect that we see is an indefinite continuation of the war between North Viet-Nam and the rest of Indo-China which neither side can win.

G) The longer the war goes on, the more difficult it will be to arrange a negotiated settlement. After this year's South Vietnamese

elections, it will be even more difficult to negotiate, and after our forces are reduced to a minimum, it will be still more difficult. It seems to us it is in everyone's interests to open negotiations now.

H) South Viet-Nam has a constitution and functioning government, and new elections for a National Assembly and the President will take place in August and October. The South Vietnamese will not give up their constitution or their elections in favor of Hanoi's proposals for a provisional government that will install a coalition government by means of an election. That is a reality that Hanoi must face. Hanoi will not accept the present constitution and government in South Viet-Nam which is a reality that South Viet-Nam must face. But negotiations have a dynamics of their own. Once there is a cease-fire and negotiations all kinds of formulas and arrangements which represent something between the South Vietnamese Government and the Hanoi proposals can be examined and discussed. A serious attempt on both sides to find a middle way in which the interests of all sides are protected could in our opinion produce a negotiated settlement. We, therefore, propose immediate negotiations for a cease-fire to be followed by negotiations for an overall and durable settlement.

5. If the other side is determined to stick to its old formula, there is probably nothing to be gained in pursuing the matter. If there is interest in real negotiations, we could then table a package at the second meeting which might contain:

I) Terminal date for withdrawal of all U.S. forces, say in a 12 month period, effective perhaps 1 September 1972.

II) Terminal date would not be effective until prisoner exchange completed.

III) Cease-fire in all SEA to become effective 1 September 1971.

IV) Infiltration limited to amount needed to provide for rotation and supply of troops and to make up losses.

V) International supervision of cease-fire.

VI) On completion of withdrawal of U.S. forces and exchange of prisoners all foreign troops would begin withdrawal from countries of Indo-China—(NVN from Laos, Cambodia, SVN; Thais from Laos), such withdrawal to be completed within six months, i.e., by March 1, 1973.

Thieu would be informed of this package.³

³ In backchannel message WHS 1047 to Bunker, May 25, Kissinger informed him that a secret meeting was set for May 31 and that he would use a modified version of Bunker's recommendations, excluding specific withdrawal deadlines. Kissinger further told him that the administration would never concede to North Vietnamese demands to replace South Vietnam's leaders and that such political issues should be settled by the Vietnamese themselves. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David Cables, 10/69–12/31/71)

6. Meeting between two Presidents, late June or early July. Thieu would:

A) Say GVN would not require ground combat role of U.S. troops after December 31, 1971.

B) Request U.S. to withdraw all troops by September 1, 1972.

C) Agree to exchange of all prisoners by September 1, 1972.

7. President Nixon would assure Thieu on following points:

A) The U.S. will provide long-term economic aid.

B) Acceleration of Vietnamization and further strengthening of RVNAF with additional equipment.

C) Continuation of air support until RVN Air Force attains adequate strength.

8. I discussed with Thieu April 16 the question of a political initiative. In all the previous discussions we have had, the last one taking place during Secretary Laird's meeting with him,⁴ Thieu agreed in principle that some political initiative would be advisable, but he has always added that the timing is important, that the problem is difficult and that there are limitations on what he can say. He expressed similar views today, but said he was having his staff study problem carefully. Regarding timing, he thought it is too soon after Lam Son 719 to do it now lest it be misinterpreted by Hanoi and his own people. On the other hand it cannot be done too close to the Vietnamese elections lest it become an issue in the elections. The most favorable time for the initiative would be prior to his meeting with the President.

Warm regards.

⁴ See Document 105.

185. Conversation Among President Nixon, his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and the White House Chief of Staff (Haldeman)¹

Washington, April 17, 1971.

Nixon: That's right, but they say, "Well, by God, we're going to keep—" It—well, the main thing it does: it tells the enemy that in no uncertain terms that, by God, you're going to do—we're going to stay right there, and also, I've thrown out something there, as you noticed: that we're going to bomb 'em, which we damn well will. If we've withdrawn and they haven't returned a thing, we'll bomb the hell out of North Vietnam. Get my point? Just bomb the living bejeezus out of it, and everybody would approve of it. Well, I don't know about that.

Haldeman: You made a good point last night² that this—

Nixon: Did you see Kissinger?

Haldeman: [unclear] come through, at least, because I picked up that is the one we ought to get people to expand on, too—and we will—which is in all this babbling about the civilians and the refugees, which was the whole point you made of how many, how many the VC have killed.

Nixon: 50,000 men—

[unclear exchange]

Haldeman: And, what would happen if we weren't there.

Nixon: A million refugees.

Haldeman: If we weren't killing VCs, who are the aggressors in this, or North Vietnamese—

Nixon: The bloody aggressor.

Haldeman: —what would they be doing to the South Vietnamese, who are just sitting ducks? And now—

Nixon: [unclear] Jesus Christ [unclear].

Haldeman: That incident played back. We talked about that a couple of years ago. That doesn't really come out. [unclear]

Nixon: They won't use it. They won't use that sort of thing because it's just too true.

Haldeman: Yeah.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 481–7. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. The exchange is part of a larger conversation, 1–3:30 p.m. According to the Nixon tapes log, Butterfield was present during part of the conversation.

² See Document 174.

Nixon: But I was able to personalize it. I'll say I was in Hanoi, and I was there in the, basically, refugee camps, when a million of 'em came south. And what's going to happen to these people?

[Omitted here is discussion of a statement by Department of State spokesman Robert McCloskey.]

Kissinger: I think the China story³ has driven Vietnam into a secondary rank.

Nixon: For what?

Haldeman: Although going into Laos has been—we've got to watch that, too. I think that's been the view of—

Kissinger: Who's going into Laos?

Haldeman: The South Vietnamese.

Kissinger: Oh, but that's just in and out.

Nixon: I mean, these—these little—they've already done that.

Kissinger: Uh—

Nixon: Those raids? Is that what you mean?

Kissinger: Yeah, yeah.

Nixon: The raids?

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: We've been in twice, and they didn't make a blip.

Haldeman: Now they're—now they're talking about the buildup in Ashau, and all that stuff—

Kissinger: Yeah, but Ashau is in—on the Vietnamese side.

Nixon: But that is—

Haldeman: It still leads to Laos, doesn't it?

Nixon: I know.

Kissinger: Yeah, but they clean that out once a year, in order to prevent an attack on Hue. They're not going deep into there. They'll—that won't go.

Haldeman: That's the only, only area where you've got any activity in Vietnam that's gonna, you know, make a blip.

Kissinger: I know, but there isn't much—

Nixon: I do not think that will be too big. I—my guess is that I don't think it'll make that big an operation. Does it, Henry?

Kissinger: No. And, they're not—the South Vietnamese aren't going anywhere where they're going to suffer casualties right now. Doing that for their own [unclear].

³ Reference is to the Chinese invitation to the U.S. ping pong team.

Haldeman: They did good at Fire Base 6. They finally—even the media has finally got [laughs] has given us that.

Kissinger: That was a big victory.

Haldeman: Sure. But it took a long time before they admitted it. They didn't call it that. They—

Kissinger: Oh yeah, they're now give—

Haldeman: [unclear]

Kissinger: —1,500 enemy killed, three battalions—

Nixon: By the ARVN.

Kissinger: By the ARVN.

Nixon: And a little air power. The Ashau Valley, I don't think it's the same thing as Laos, Bob, for the reason that it doesn't involve a tremendous exposed flank, and all the rest. I mean, they're just going to—

Haldeman: It is the same thing, though—

Nixon: Incidentally—

Haldeman: [unclear] the media [unclear] I think you're gonna—any chance they get, like they're picking up Abrams' statement that he wouldn't rule out another invasion of Laos.⁴

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: That's—they're, they're going to look for any little thing—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: —like that to try and regenerate. I don't think they'll succeed. I think you're right.

Nixon: Yeah. Well—

Kissinger: Besides, I told [John F.] Osborne, you know—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: You remember now, 6 weeks ago, everyone told us that we are bringing China into Southeast Asia.

Haldeman: Yeah. That's the one that's fun to throw at them.

Nixon: Yeah. What did he say?

Kissinger: And I said, "Now, look—"

Nixon: Because he wrote it, too—

Kissinger: Yeah. I said not—not a word that they haven't mentioned Vietnam once on this whole trip of this ping pong team, and to the journalists. The Hanoi people put out a statement in Paris today

⁴ See footnote 3, Document 186.

saying that China stands unalterably behind them. I consider that a sign of weakness. They have to put out a statement—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: And they put it out, not China?

Kissinger: No, no. Hanoi put it out in Paris.

Nixon: We just know that means that they're, they're defensive—

Kissinger: That they're defensive, and they announced in Hanoi a railway agreement between China and North Vietnam with big fanfare—the sort of thing they do once every 6 months.

Nixon: Hmm.

[Omitted here is discussion of arrangements for Congressional testimony on the Laos operation and Congressional reaction to the visit of the United States ping-pong team to the People's Republic of China.]

Kissinger: You see, the way we are setting up the Hanoi thing, we'll be in a position where we either get a settlement, or announce, together with Thieu, not a complete terminal date, but something in which, for a ceasefire and—and a prisoner exchange, we will give a terminal date.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: So, if we will either get Hanoi to agree, or we'll announce it during the summit—

Nixon: Remember, at the same—at that time, too, we will then announce the end of the American combat role.

Kissinger: At the same time—

Nixon: At the very least.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: What I think we ought to do on that, if we—if it turns out that way, is not to put it all in one announcement. I'd have it—I'd make it a two-day meeting. Let's let 'em come one day, and then come the other. And we could get maximum bang out of it.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: Knock everything for what it's worth.

[Omitted here is discussion of China and Germany.]

186. **Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the President's Assistant for National Security (Kissinger) and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)**¹

Washington, April 18, 1971.

K: Tom, OK. Where are you?

M: I'm at home.

K: Oh, Tom, I don't know whether Hanoi got to you.

M: Yes he did.

K: But the President was having absolute fits about that Abrams thing.²

M: You mean what's in the paper this morning.³

K: Yeh. Now my problem is—you know they have all gone through hell for a few weeks and we finally got Vietnam off the front pages and we don't want to get it there again if we can avoid it.

M: Right.

K: On the other hand we want these operations to go forward. And you know what is going to happen if this draws too much flack and we give a directive to Laird to cool it, how he will interpret it.

M: Yeh.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 9, Chronological File. No classification marking. The time of the conversation is unknown. A note on the transcript indicates that Kissinger's secretary typed it on May 7.

² According to the President's Daily Diary, Kissinger spoke on the telephone with the President at the following times on April 18: 10:23–10:35 a.m.; 10:41–10:48 a.m.; and 1:28–1:36 p.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files) According to a transcript of one of those conversations, Nixon stated: "The thing is that this is what the press is trying to do. They want a story. It doesn't make any difference what he [Abrams] does. I don't care if he goes in and bombs the hell out of them, but don't say it. The press want to put Vietnam back on the front pages. This one little story, God-damn it, is in two papers on the front page. Right." (Ibid., Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 9, Chronological File)

³ The headline on a front page story in *The New York Times* proclaimed "A New Incursion in Laos Possible, Abrams Indicates." The *Washington Post* ran a front-page story entitled "Viet Push Into Laos Indicated," that reads in part, "Gen. Creighton Abrams, the U.S. Commander in Vietnam, said today a fresh South Vietnamese drive is under way in the Ashau Valley that could involve renewed attacks in Laos."

K: Now I don't know what possessed Abrams to tell you the truth. I mean when I read the *Post* account he actually walked up to these newsmen.⁴

M: Yeh, that is what it said. I mean after having been . . .

K: After having been clear of them.

M: That's the way they presented it but I don't know if that is actually what happened or not. Yeh, I don't know why he did that either other than of course this is more the idea—get across the idea that the South Vietnamese are still there active.

K: But the demonstrations are coming up this week. I think at this stage of the game as long as people think we know what we are doing, it isn't in our interest to get a big debate started as long as we continue doing what we are doing.

M: I couldn't agree with you more.

K: Don't you think?

M: Of course. Well I will get the word out there to him. I guess the damage is done now although I think that the least said about it the better right now . . .

K: But can't we keep them—it also mentioned somebody, the 101st Airborne—can't they just shut up for awhile out there?

M: I will get that word out. Don't worry.

K: Because believe me we're doing our best to try to keep operations going.

M: I will get that through to everybody, Henry. [everyone's asleep]⁵ now but I will see that they get it first thing in the morning. Their morning.

K: OK. Not to stop what they are doing. Just to stop talking.

M: Absolutely, I understand.

K: Tom, have a good Sunday.

M: Right. They'll get the word. Tell the President that they will get the word.

K: Right. Oh Tom, Zumwalt was over the other day on a few—on a social call. And there were a few Navy things he raised which I told

⁴ When Nixon made this point to Kissinger in their earlier telephone conversation, the President said, "He just got sucked into it. Some God-damned newspaper guy wanted to get a story to the effect we were going back in Laos, because the news guys out there are dying. He just feels so compelled to be so God-damned honest all the time. Why doesn't he just shut up." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 9, Chronological File)

⁵ Brackets are in the original.

him to take up with you too. And I just want you to know that he said he would. It wasn't—it was just he had been very nice to me so I had him over for lunch. It wasn't anything official.

M: All right. I'll see him tomorrow.

K: Right.

M: Thank you. Good bye.

187. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

Resignation of Lon Nol

Ambassador Swank has reported conversations with Chief of State Cheng Heng, Acting Prime Minister Sirik Matak and Foreign Minister Koun Wick concerning the resignation of Lon Nol on April 20.² The main points of our information follow:

—Public announcement of Lon Nol's resignation was made on April 20th and it is expected that he will be elevated to an honorific post such as "Marshal of the Cambodian Army."

—Acting Prime Minister Sirik Matak is expected to replace him with the consent of the National Assembly although an adjustment in cabinet positions will be required.

—Lon Nol's physical and related emotional incapability of bearing the burdens of office have become clear to the Cambodians since his return to Phnom Penh. The Cambodian leadership has decided, apparently with Lon Nol's consent, that responsibility should become definitely fixed at the top for important decisions, which is not possible with Sirik Matak in an "acting" status.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 512, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. XII. Secret. Sent for information. According to the attached NSC correspondence profile, Kissinger sent it on April 21. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² Swank reported the conversations in telegrams 1826 and 1840 from Phnom Penh, both April 19. (Ibid.)

—Cheng Heng will remain as Chief of State as Sihanouk's constitutional successor, thus providing legitimacy for the government.

Comment: Ambassador Swank believes that over the next few weeks during the change of government much will depend on the fitness of the Ministry of Information in handling the public relations aspect of the matter and on the speed of the National Assembly in taking responsible action on a successor. Swank has made it clear to Cheng Heng that prolonged instability of the Cambodian Government could have disastrous implications for the U.S. assistance programs and he will make the same point to others. Swank observes that competition among potential candidates for the office of Prime Minister could still be a problem.

We understand that the future handling of Lon Nol's sometimes over-ambitious younger brother Lon Non has been the specific subject of a conversation between Lon Nol and Sirik Matak. Though Lon Non's ability to advance himself has derived largely from his relationship to his elder brother, his troublemaking potential will continue to bear close watching by both the Cambodian leadership and ourselves.³

³ In backchannel message 1563 to Haig, April 21, Ladd confirmed that Lon Nol intended to resign. Ladd commented that while the mechanisms for governmental changes might seem to be unnecessarily complex, "the Orientals have some strange political procedures that seem to make sense to them and often in the long run work rather well." Kissinger forwarded the message to Nixon under an April 21 covering memorandum, writing that the situation appeared under control and that Lon Nol would probably manage things behind the scenes and re-enter politics later. (Ibid.) On May 7, a new Cambodian Government was formed with Lon Nol as titular Prime Minister, Sirik Matak as his delegate, and three Deputy Prime Ministers still to be named. (Ibid.)

188. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, April 21, 1971.

Nixon: The war presents a very serious problem. You see, the war has eroded America's confidence up to this point. The people are sick of it, and, and so, therefore, our game here, of course, must be to deal with it. And we've played it right to the hilt with no support and got—and, as far as the last Laotian thing, goddamn poor execution on the part of the military. No support from anybody else and a poor excuse military. On the other hand, we also have to realize that simply ending the war in the right way may not save the country. At this point, if it goes too far—Let's put it this way: let's suppose the war ends; let's suppose that it isn't known until next year; and then the war is over, and then, politically, we go down—the country. No way. You understand?

Kissinger: Oh, yes.

Nixon: Everything has to be played, now, in terms of how we survive. It has to be played that way due to—not because of the war, and not because of Asia, but because of defense. Goddammit, nobody else is going to be for defense. Who the hell else is going to be for defense? It's the point I make there. Who's going to be sitting there?

Kissinger: Well, of course, it depends entirely on how one interprets ending the war. I—I think your strength is that you've been a strong President.

Nixon: That's true, and I agree. I agree. I'm simply saying—

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: —saying that we realize, though that—

Kissinger: Even the, I think, the polls if you had announced a cave-in on April 7th,² I think in—

Nixon: It'd move the other way.

Kissinger: —two months, you would've been the way that—

Nixon: Johnson.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 484–13. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. This exchange is part of a larger conversation, 12:50–1:43 p.m.

² See Document 174.

Kissinger: —Johnson was after Glassboro. You would have had a big rise, and then a sharp—but, I’m no expert at that.

Nixon: Let me put it this way: I had no intention of announcing a cave-in, as you know. I had no intention of it. As a matter of fact, we took the Laotian gamble solely for the reason that—

Kissinger: Absolutely.

Nixon: —we had one more. The Laotian gamble cost us. It cost us very, very seriously, because we probably did—Well, let me put it this way: had it not been done—I think the comfort we can take from it—had it not been done, there certainly would’ve been a big summer offensive by the Communists this summer. All right, on the other hand, doing it did—as, as Baker put it pretty well. He thought the war issue was finished last fall. A lot of people thought it was finished, and everybody was relaxed. And that’s why we held up rather well in the polls. The action in Laos, itself, dropped us ten points in the polls. You know that?

Kissinger: No question.

Nixon: Just the action. And then, the coverage of the action continued to drop us. We held it off just a little by our press conference. Then, of course, the, the night after night on television continued to drop us—a little. Then, then came the defeat weekend, which took us along. Then came Kalb, which shook the stuff all up. And then, for the first time, we get a little bit up from—a good boost by reason of doing something that the people wanted in Calley. But, even after the speech, we have to realize, we’re only back to where we were. Not to where we were before we went into Laos, but when we—but where we were after we had taken the bump going into Laos.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: See my point? Now, what I’m getting at is that from now on, we have to ruthlessly play for the best news that we can.

Kissinger: No question.

Nixon: That’s why I would have—we—Henry, that’s why I was disturbed about Abrams’ statement about supporting Thieu—³

Kissinger: Oh, it was outrageous.

Nixon: You see, it’s that—it’s what we have to realize: that, from now on, Henry, the people have got to be reassured.

Kissinger: I—I—

Nixon: I’ve got to have good news—

³ See Document 186.

Kissinger: On—on that, I agree, and we can do—well, see, a lot would depend—supposing Hanoi bites at this proposal.⁴ Then, of course, we'll settle the war—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: —then—then we'll settle the war this year, and then we have no problem. But, assuming Hanoi rejects the proposal—

Nixon: That's right. There's where we go.

Kissinger: Well, but then—

Nixon: [unclear] I want us to reexamine, though, the—it, if it—but, let's assume rejection. We've got to examine the strongest possible thing we could do this year. That's my point—

Kissinger: Well, that's something—

Nixon: Or, because we may erode so much, that next year won't matter.

Kissinger: No, but that's what I'm asking—

Nixon: Don't assume—you see, Henry, you've been calculating, and we've all been calculating, "Well, we'll make a final announcement in April or May of next year."

Kissinger: No. No, no, I—

Nixon: The final announcement must be made later this summer. That's when it must be made.

Kissinger: Well, the—

Nixon: People have got to know. People have got to know. I don't mean you put the date on, necessarily. People have got to know the war is over. They've got to know that—

Kissinger: Well, preferably, it should be made after the Vietnamese election. But, we—

Nixon: Well, we can, we can make it go that long.

Kissinger: But we can wait. We can do—

Nixon: [unclear] I'm just saying, you've got to examine it. Let's remember, if we're going to make the final announcement, don't hold it. I mean, don't worry so goddamn much about the Vietnamese election. You'd better worry about our own.

Kissinger: Well, I think the final announcement should certainly

⁴ In a backchannel message to Walters, April 22, Haig instructed Walters to propose orally the following in his April 24 private meeting with the North Vietnamese leadership: "The U.S. Government is prepared to renew discussions, on the basis of new approaches, looking toward a negotiated solution to the conflict. If your side wishes also to talk in this spirit, Dr. Kissinger stands ready to meet again with Minister Xuan Thuy in Paris on Sunday, May 16." (*ibid.*, NSC Files, Box 853, For the President's Files—Lord, China Trip, Vietnam, Vol. VII)

be made this year, and it should be a part of the next announcement—your—well—

Nixon: The No—November 15th, you mean?

Kissinger: Well, or—or it could be November 1st. Well, whether it's the 15th or the 1st of November, or October 20th, that's no—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —makes no difference as long as the Vietnamese election is behind us—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: Secondly, we can, during the summer—

Nixon: We'll take a look at the Vietnamese election. We'll see how it comes out, who shapes up, who's getting into it and the rest. Let's see.

Kissinger: Well, we can—

Nixon: This summer, we could do—

Kissinger: This summer, we can announce the end of American ground combat, and we can probably announce—and I'm just going to drive it—announce the end of draftees being sent.

Nixon: I think you've got to drive that.

Kissinger: And—

Nixon: I'll say that I think that has to be. Look, when a guy as hawkish as Bill Buckley⁵—

Kissinger: No question.

Nixon: —is hitting it, goddamnit—

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: —let's just do it. Now—

Kissinger: [unclear]

Nixon: —I have to tell you, I'm getting sick of the military, anyway. They drag their feet about everything, and they—the bastards want everything, and they're selfish. They [unclear].

Kissinger: Well, you see, for example, if you had a meeting in Midway with, with Thieu⁶—

Nixon: Um-hmm?

Kissinger: —at which you announce the end of American ground combat, plus the end of American draftees—

Nixon: Those two things.

⁵ William F. Buckley, Editor-in-Chief, *National Review*.

⁶ Nixon was considering meeting with Thieu at Midway Island, probably in June, at which time they would announce the end of the American combat role in South Vietnam.

Kissinger: —that would be a pretty big—

Nixon: That would be a good thing—

Kissinger: —story. It would be a—that would take the mothers off your back immediately. If you could announce that: “After July 1st, no more draftees would be sent to Vietnam.” Uh—

Nixon: Can you drive that?

Kissinger: I’m driving it like crazy. Laird is fighting it, probably because he wants to leak the thing himself.

Nixon: Aren’t—aren’t you planning to have him in for breakfast, one day here?

Kissinger: Yeah, tomorrow or Friday.⁷

Nixon: Want me to work it out now? Or—

Kissinger: Yeah, that would be a good one to work out. I forgot to raise it with Haldeman in the morning.

[Omitted here is discussion of Nixon’s schedule.]

Kissinger: Another thing we could do, Mr. President, for the summer: if—supposing Hanoi turns us down.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: Then, I think, out of the Midway thing we should offer a deadline. We know they’re going to turn it down, anyway.

Nixon: Well, we’ve offered a deadline, but not—never publicly, huh?

Kissinger: By that time, we’ll have offered the deadline, privately. They’ll have turned it down—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —then, we’ll offer it, publicly. By that time, that will get the, the—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —the doves off our back for the rest of the summer. Then, you can do it unilaterally. At that time, the offer would be release prisoners—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —cease-fire, and a deadline. They will then refuse that.

Nixon: Not bad.

Kissinger: I mean, we’ll know—

Nixon: It’s about as far as we can go. I mean, I’m just asking, Henry, how far we could go short of—

⁷ No record of a meeting between Kissinger and Laird has been found.

Kissinger: Now, on the other hand, if they—

Nixon: —a bug out.

Kissinger: —if they have accepted our propositions, so we are not—

Nixon: Oh, if they accept it, it's a different case.

Kissinger: Then, we don't announce it at, at Midway, we'll just get it done during the summer. And, if they've accepted our proposition, the more squealing our opponents do, the better off you are.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: Because you know you're going to pull the rug right out from under them—

Nixon: That's right. That's right. That's right—

Kissinger: So, so either way, once we've made the proposition to them, and they've rejected it, we can have a very successful Midway meeting—

Nixon: Yeah, we'll see.

[Omitted here is discussion of Dobrynin's schedule.]

189. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, April 23, 1971.

SUBJECT

Sir Robert Thompson Comments on Vietnam

Sir Robert Thompson recently spent several weeks in South Vietnam making a survey of the Vietnamese police. He also wrote me a letter² in which he made the following observations:

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 92, Vietnam Subject Files, Sir Robert Thompson (71). Secret. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen." Holdridge forwarded it to Kissinger under an April 23 covering memorandum, indicating that it was a revised text of an April 16 memorandum from Smyser to Kissinger, which Kissinger had asked be prepared for the President. (Ibid.)

² Thompson's letter, April 1, attached but not printed, was written in London.

Situation in South Vietnam

—There is a great disparity between the situation in South Vietnam and what many in the U.S. believe it to be. This is no longer a credibility gap but a “comprehensibility gap.”

—The internal situation is “steadily improving” with pacification, land reform and other civil programs apparently going well.

—President Thieu is virtually certain to win re-election.

—The place where most help is now needed is in revamping the institutional framework of the country—the Judiciary, the recodification of law, the technical departments and the whole administrative machine and its antiquated procedures.³

—This will help restore standards of social justice which have been degraded by the war.⁴

—Militarily, the most worrisome area of the country is the “B–3 front” in the central highlands, primarily because the South Vietnamese are weakest there. Elsewhere, the situation has developed to the point that providing security for individuals is the chief objective, rather than for whole villages as before.⁵

The Effects of Lam Son

—It appears there is now no possibility of the NVA mounting or sustaining any offensive against South Vietnam through 1972 except in the immediate vicinity of the DMZ. As in last year’s Cambodian operation, the full effects of Lam Son will not be seen for several months.

—It already seems clear that two long-term strategic objectives have been achieved. First, the GVN has succeeded in reversing the Communist concept of securing their own bases while attacking their enemy’s; second, the operation has been a test for South Vietnam as a whole and has been successfully passed.

—However, there is no indication that Hanoi’s intentions have changed.

³ Thompson wrote in his letter that the South Vietnamese salary structure was “an over-complicated mess and basically men are being paid to breed and not to work.” He further noted that revenue was markedly below its potential, adding that wealthier peasants paid virtually no taxes and that the United States was helping the GVN meet the gap between revenue and expenditure.

⁴ Nixon highlighted these two paragraphs and wrote in the margin, “K. Be sure our bureaucracy follows up on his recommendations.”

⁵ Thompson wrote that the enemy seemed to be adhering to a policy of “political subversion, terrorism and penetration, while at the same time trying to hold onto his remaining traditional base areas in the country.”

The U.S. Withdrawal Schedule

—The major factor in this war is now psychological and one of South Vietnamese confidence.

—The U.S. domestic debate over Vietnam and the continuing uncertainty about U.S. policy is an obvious problem in this respect. Not only does it cause Hanoi to stall in Paris, but it creates among the South Vietnamese a desire for more U.S. troops to remain than are physically necessary.⁶

—The extent of the U.S. withdrawal by mid-1972 must be a finely adjusted balance between the maximum allowable by U.S. domestic pressures and the minimum required “to demonstrate visibly to the Vietnamese that U.S. support is still available.” We should not become too committed to a fixed rate of withdrawal.

Comment: Sir Robert’s observations strike me as being quite useful. Regarding the “comprehensibility gap,” he has been helping out by doing some work with the press. *U.S. News and World Report* recently printed an interview with him, and a Japanese magazine ran one of his articles. He also wrote a piece for *Life* which has not been printed, apparently because it runs counter to *Life*’s editorial policy. Finally, Sir Robert told me that he intends to urge Sir Alec Douglas Home to give U.S. policy more support during the coming year. Sir Robert will be here next month to discuss his report on the South Vietnamese police.⁷

⁶ Nixon underlined most of this paragraph.

⁷ Nixon highlighted this paragraph and wrote the following, “K. See if Scali can get his report out and get some press attention for him also.”

190. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, April 23, 1971.

Nixon: If it’s not television, it’s gone. You see, the point is that you have to realize that that’s what, what really matters in terms of the public thing. After all, the television at the present time is—it has zeroed

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 487–7. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. This exchange is part of a larger conversation, 11:56 a.m.–12:19 p.m.

in on these people. It'll zero in on the demonstrations Saturday,² and then they'll try to play it over the next two weeks. They're stringing it out, and it's highly-unconscionable reporting on the part of television—

Kissinger: Oh, it's awful.

Nixon: Highly unconscionable. They're—they're just, just—They—

Kissinger: Well, they want to destroy you, and they want us to lose in Vietnam.

Nixon: I really think that it's more—it's more the latter. They'd destroy me. I think it's—If they think—they know—They know that they're, that they're both the same.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: But deep down, basically, you want to realize that critics of the war are furious that when they thought they had it licked, when they threw Johnson out of office, they thought, "Well, now, we've won our point on the war." Now, we've come in, and it looks like we're gonna—they know what it is.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: They do, because—despite all the way we put the cosmetics on, Henry, they know goddamn well that what our policy is, is to win the war.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: And winning the war simply means—

Kissinger: But it—

Nixon: —letting South Vietnam survive. That's all.

Kissinger: To come out honorably—

Nixon: That wins the war.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: Now, with this in mind we've got to realize that we are dealing—that, that they're—this is—that's your TV people, that's your newspaper people. I mean, despite—who was it? One [unclear] guy says that, "Some of my colleagues want you to lose, but we don't—I don't." Was it Severeid³ who told you that?

Kissinger: Hubbard.⁴

Nixon: Hubbard. Okay, maybe, maybe he believes that. He doesn't represent the majority. Those guys out there in that pressroom, 90 percent of them, want us to lose.

² The anti-war movement had scheduled a major demonstration in Washington for Saturday, April 24.

³ Eric Severeid, a CBS News journalist.

⁴ Henry Hubbard, White House correspondent for *Newsweek*.

Kissinger: No, now the masks are coming off. [unclear] for example, I mean—or whoever wrote this *Washington Post* editorial today⁵—they now say we have to give up our interest in the future of the South Vietnamese Government. That's the only way we can get out. They want it to lose. I mean, that's now—they used to have cease-fire, and 50 other things.

Nixon: Yeah. But now, they say—they point out when I said that one, one condition, which I've always said, is that the—that Vietnamization, basically, in—by an—by definition means a withdraw—Our policy is not a withdrawal. Our policy is a withdrawal in a way that will let South Vietnam survive.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: We always said that. And now, you see, we—I think it's good we forced them out now, so that they're finally saying that, that they want—They say, "We must give up on the right of the South Vietnamese." Even the *Christian Science Monitor*, I know, has an editorial to that effect.⁶ Well then, if we did, then nobody—there wouldn't be any recrimination in this country, because nobody really cares what happens to South Vietnam. They're crazy as hell.

Kissinger: They're crazy as hell.

Nixon: They're crazy as hell because, afterwards—

Kissinger: That's what the radicals understand: they want to break the government. They want to break confidence in the government. They don't give a damn about Vietnam, because as soon as Vietnam is finished, I will guarantee the radicals will be all over us—or all over any government for any of it—for other things. These tactics of confrontation aren't going to end it. And, our tremendous national malaise—right now, the Establishment has the great excuse of Vietnam.

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: No matter what goes wrong, they blame Vietnam.

Nixon: That's right. Well, I told you what the college presidents, at the time of—do you remember, they were just—they were really relieved, really. That, as they say, their campuses were politicized. Do you remember the torrents—

Kissinger: Oh, yeah.

Nixon: —of frustration because of Cambodia? But, they were relieved, because it took the heat off of them.

⁵ On April 23, *The Washington Post* ran an editorial entitled "American Interest in Re-electing Thieu" (p. A 22).

⁶ Apparently a reference to a front-page editorial in *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 6, 1971.

Kissinger: Well, they told you, “If you go on national—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: —television, don’t talk about university problems, talk about international affairs.” When you asked, “What should I talk about,” they said, “Don’t talk about university problems, talk about international affairs—”

Nixon: And one day, when the war is over, then they’ve got to look in the mirror. And, they don’t want to do that, do they?

Kissinger: That’s right.

Nixon: That’s the real thing.

Kissinger: And face the real issues. I remember four—three years ago when Arthur⁷ first flew up. I told the liberals there that two years from now it will be infinitely worse with all the concessions you’ve made. You meet every one of these points, you’ll be worse off. Last year when the radicals smashed every window in Harvard Square, one of those professors was honest enough to call me up and say, “Yes, now I see.”

Nixon: Did he?

Kissinger: Yeah. But, it got—now, now they have big riots at Harvard. They’re not reporting them, or big to-dos—

Nixon: Are there riots going on, now?

Kissinger: Well, they have a tremendous campaign on against professors they consider right-wing, with a slogan: “No Free Speech for War Criminals.” In other words, the movement that started as a free speech movement in Berkeley is now a “No Free Speech” movement for war criminals. And they’re after—

Nixon: Oh, boy.

Kissinger: —some of my colleagues—

Nixon: Isn’t that a shame?

Kissinger: Sam Huntington, who would be—

Nixon: Yeah, I know—liberal.

Kissinger: Liberal—well, he’s honest.

Nixon: I know him, I know him. I know who he is.

Kissinger: And they want to force him off the faculty.

Nixon: I hope he doesn’t go.

Kissinger: No, but I—the Dean of the School of Public—the Kennedy School—called me yesterday and said, “We’re holding a meet-

⁷ Possibly a reference to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., then Albert Schweitzer Professor of Humanities, City University of New York.

ing, and we're convincing our faculty to vote for him." I said, "Why do you have to have a meeting to affirm that you are against the 'No Free Speech,' and that—and why do you have to convince anybody? That ought to be taken for granted—"

Nixon: Who is "they," when they say "No Free Speech for War Criminals—?"

Kissinger: That's the SDS chapter. The—

Nixon: But, my God, does that represent the whole school?
[unclear]

Kissinger: No, but it's the 10 percent of the activists, and the others are cowardly. But, I think it's the macrocosm of our society, Mr. President. I think the big problem in this country—I feel that as a historian, it's going to happen after the war is over. They know the war is over—

Nixon: Even if we end it right well?

Kissinger: No. No—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: —but that's why the radicals—the radicals understand what they're doing. You—You cannot win for two reasons: one because it's you; you're so anathema—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: Two—

Nixon: They never—they know that they never will influence me.

Kissinger: And, and, therefore, you don't panic. You're not Johnson. And, secondly, because they think the war is a magnificent opportunity to break the self-confidence of this, of this country.

Nixon: And the system, really—

Kissinger: And of the system. So, they use both of it. But, they'll be back next year with the war over, and they'll find some other issue. These conference—if the war is over next year, or whenever it will be—

Nixon: Hmm?

Kissinger: —or two years from now, when it'll surely be completely over—and they'll find enough in Vietnam for a good long time, because—

Nixon: And then, we will be supporting the Thieu-Ky government with military assistance—

Kissinger: They're already starting that.

Nixon: —economic—oh, I know, and I know they will, Henry. Just like they do in Cambodia.

Kissinger: In fact, I am wondering, Mr. President, if—it can't be done this minute [unclear] shouldn't go on the offensive against them. Whether one isn't—

Nixon: Yeah, I know. I know.

Kissinger: —on the wrong wicket, batting back the balls they throw? Whether one shouldn't accuse them of turning the things over to the Communists? I just don't have the sense that this is a soft country.

Nixon: I think I have been on the offensive as much as I can be.

Kissinger: You have been the—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: You have—

Nixon: You know, everything I have said in my speech, in that meeting with the editors was hard-line—

Kissinger: You couldn't do—

Nixon: Hell, there's—What, what more could I—I couldn't [unclear]—

Kissinger: You can do no more. You can do no more.

Nixon: —a thing. Do you think? Or should I do more? I think—

Kissinger: Not right now.

Nixon: —I can hit them harder.

Kissinger: Not right now—

Nixon: I know. I don't think I can and still maintain any—you know, we've got to still maintain, basically, the [unclear]—that kind.

Kissinger: No.

Nixon: That's our problem

Kissinger: No. No.

[Omitted here is discussion about the impact of the end of Vietnam War on the press and politics, Kissinger's discussion with Thomas W. Braden, and John Connally's response to the press.]

Kissinger: Well, I'll be interested to see what the North Vietnamese are going to do. I—I think if we—as long as you stay in your present posture, I think we are—we may have a chance of breaking it this year.

Nixon: We'll see.

Kissinger: Or getting [unclear]. Or getting them to turn it down, and if they do, we can—we'll surface that, because then we don't need anything from them.

Nixon: Well, what I was going to tell you is that I think when you go to Paris⁸ that you've got to present it in a way—listen, I want it to be done in way so that everybody—so that, so that—that with the

⁸ See footnote 4, Document 188.

assumption that we will want to be able to tell Rogers and everybody else that you've gone.

Kissinger: Right. Oh, I'm going openly.

Nixon: Openly, that's what I mean. Then you—but when you—You're meeting them, as you already know—

Kissinger: No.

Nixon: And then you have your meeting, and then we will say nothing about it in the event that anything's going to come out of it. If something does not come out of it, however, then let's say something about it and say, "Well, I was over there, and we knew it." And have in mind the fact that we'll surface those portions of it that will serve our interests.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: And, and—in other words, make an offer. Make an offer. Now—

Kissinger: Mr. President—

Nixon: I—in other words, try to think in terms of, of—if you get to the point where you're talking to them, and they're dancing around, make an offer that is so outlandish—you know, not outlandish in terms of it—that they really ought to accept it. In other words, move the date and, right after, say, "We've offered this." You see what I'm getting at?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: And they won't. If—they're either going to make a deal, or they've determined to sit it out. If they're not going to make a deal, then, the thing to do is to make an offer that makes them look absolutely intransigent. See?

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: And then, with the idea that the purpose is, is not to get them to accept the offer—we hope to Christ they don't; we know they won't—but that the purpose is to make an offer that is—

Kissinger: What I thought is, in the first meeting, I wouldn't give them any date, so that it can't fail on that. I'd say, "We'll give you a date, if you're willing to do—have a cease-fire and a repatriation of prisoners." So then, they can't say we gave them a, a lousy date.

Nixon: Hmm.

Kissinger: If they accept that in principle, then, we can go ahead. If they don't accept it in principle—if they say, "You've got to overthrow Thieu, Ky, and Khiem, too—"

Nixon: It's out [unclear].

Kissinger: —then—then we can give them any date.

Nixon: Yeah. Then I'd off—then I would simply say, "All right, here's our date. This is it. We offer it," and I'd make it awfully good. I'd make—

Kissinger: But one thing we might consider, Mr. President—it just occurred to me this week—as long as we’re playing it this way—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —whether it—depending—if they don’t accept it, or if they keep it in abeyance—if, at the end of the meeting, I don’t tell Xuan Thuy to talk to me alone for five minutes with just his interpreter present.

Nixon: Good.

Kissinger: If I tell him, “Now, look, this President is extremely tough. You’ve been wrong every time. If you think you’re going to defeat him, if you don’t accept this, he will stop at nothing.”

Nixon: That’s right.

Kissinger: And imply that you might do it—

Nixon: That’s right.

Kissinger: Use nuclear weapons—

Nixon: And then you could say—

Kissinger: Do—do the Dulles ploy—

Nixon: You can say that. You can say, “I cannot control him.” Put it that way.

Kissinger: Yeah. And imply that you might use nuclear weapons.

Nixon: Yes, sir. “He will. I just want you to know he is not going to cave.”

Kissinger: If—if they, then, charge us with it, I’ll deny it.

Nixon: Oh, sure.

191. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, April 26, 1971.

Kissinger: Now, Lodge collared me on the way in, and he said he’s developing some awfully strong feelings on the POWs, and he wants to talk to you.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 489–5. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. This exchange is part of a larger conversation, 11:46 a.m.–12:07 p.m.

Nixon: No, I'm not going to [unclear].

Kissinger: Which is his way of saying he wants to bug out. But I told him he had to have another time; you were terribly busy.

Nixon: No, no, no [unclear].

Kissinger: I'm seeing Dobrynin at noon, and I wanted to check with you before I did.²

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: I believe, Mr. President, that your instinct on Saturday³ is the right one, that I ought to be—

Nixon: Oh, yes—

Kissinger: —tough with him.

Nixon: Tough as hell. So what—you can't do anything—?

Kissinger: No, I—what I was—

Nixon: Let me come to a couple of points before you get to that. It seems to me that—that's all I have Bob [unclear]. And I'll talk to you about that press thing after I finish these—

Haldeman: [laughs]

Nixon: —odds and ends. First, I think it—I think in view of that shelling [unclear] yesterday, we ought to hit those sites that, normally, we can't bomb now.

Kissinger: I think we ought to think about it very carefully.

Nixon: Why think, when I don't think you need to think about it? My point is, you've got to show them right after these demonstrations,⁴ that we're not going to be affected by them. I know a lot [unclear]—

Kissinger: I'm for it.

Nixon: Too much of this stuff—

Kissinger: I—

Nixon: Too much of this stuff indicating we're going to be affected by it.

Kissinger: I'm for it.

Nixon: Now, the only thing to do is to bang 'em.

Kissinger: I agree.

² Although Kissinger met with Dobrynin on April 26, they did not discuss Vietnam. A memorandum of conversation is in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIII, Soviet Union, October 1970–October 1971, Document 192.

³ April 24.

⁴ See footnote 2, Document 190.

Nixon: So, you tell them to just do it—and protective reaction. Call it “protective reaction.”

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: But, let ‘em have it.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: Understand?

Kissinger: Absolutely.

Nixon: This is the time to do it.

Kissinger: Absolutely.

Nixon: So, they killed seven Americans at this base by random shelling? Correct?

Kissinger: There—that’s the only thing they’ll understand.

Nixon: Yeah. And, also, you know, I mainly want them to know that we [unclear] demonstrations.

Kissinger: Mr. President, I’m—I’m—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —thrilled by it.

Nixon: Hit ‘em [unclear]—

Kissinger: What I saw this weekend,⁵ Mr. President—

Nixon: Up there in New York? [unclear]

Kissinger: This country needs—

Nixon: I was—

Kissinger: In Woodstock. What—that’s what I mean.

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: If we don’t—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: If we don’t do it, no one will do it.

Nixon: [unclear] no doubt, no doubt they’re going to do it. And the main point is, this is just a—we’re going to crack ‘em this week—protective reaction—but, I mean, hit all three sites, now.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: I mean, I—or two or three. I don’t know. Whatever is militarily feasible.

Kissinger: Let’s hit all of them—

⁵ Kissinger attended the Bilderberg Group conference in Woodstock, Vermont, April 23–25. The Group, made up of political, financial, and social elites from Western Europe and the United States, met in a different country each year, by invitation only, to discuss current issues.

Nixon: You know, I told Laird, "Whenever you're ready, let's go." Now, the choke-points are about ready; let 'em have it.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: We're protecting American withdrawals. Second point is this: we do need something—I need something that [David] Bruce can say on POWs on Thursday. Now, we've got to get something that he can say.

Kissinger: Absolutely.

Nixon: I don't know what he can say, but what I mean is when you've got two—stupid Cook,⁶ you know, and that jackass Miller⁷ from Iowa—both joining in this, "We'll—we'll predict—we'll end the war nine months after the POW thing." Well, of course, they're goddamn nearing our ballpark. They're—anyway, but the point is—

Kissinger: Well, they're tougher than we will be.

Nixon: What? The Congressmen are [unclear]?

Kissinger: But, they want the con—POWs released first.

Nixon: Yeah. My whole point is, though: I think that we ought to have Bruce make a cosmetic offer on POWs, which we can publish. We said we will. You see what I mean? Make the offer. It isn't going to affect your negotiation one damn bit.

Kissinger: Well, what offer are you thinking of?

Nixon: Anything.

Kissinger: All right.

Nixon: Just for the purpose—one, one we know they're going to turn down. You know what I mean? So, you could say—well, I was thinking of—You could think of something like this: "That we will—We are prepared to do—we're—we are prepared to discuss a, discuss a deadline, as soon you discuss POWs. We're prepared to."

Kissinger: That would give away this, the [unclear]

Nixon: Oh, I'm not sure.

Kissinger: That would—that you should do on television, if anyone does it.

Nixon: Well then, "We're prepared—"

Kissinger: If you're willing to do that.

Nixon: Well, put it in that—put it in the context of what we—of what we have said, then. "We're prepared to—"

⁶ Senator Marlow W. Cook (R-KY).

⁷ Senator Jack R. Miller (R-IA).

Kissinger: I mean, we can press any number of [unclear].

Nixon: Well then, say that. Then, separate it out. The—then make the, make, make the, make the POW–cease-fire—

Kissinger: That we can do.

Nixon: —make that on Thursday.

Kissinger: That we can do.

Nixon: He says, “We’ll—we, we will—we will separate those things out.” Even when I do it later, you’re going to do it privately, of course.

Kissinger: You’ll do the cease-fire—

Nixon: Because you’re—you’re going to give them the date. He’s not going to give them the date.

Kissinger: No, if he, however, says, “We’re prepared to give a date—deadline,” that’s exactly what I planned to tell them.

Nixon: Well—

Kissinger: And then, if you want, you can go this route, but it would—that would really look like yielding to the demonstrations. Then, you should do it. Why let him do it?

Nixon: Uh, no. I’m not going to give a date. We’re—we—look, we’re going to discuss it—

Kissinger: But that, they’ll accept.

Nixon: Hmm?

Kissinger: They’ll accept that.

Nixon: No, I don’t think they will.

Kissinger: Certainly.

Nixon: Cease-fire?

Kissinger: Well, I think, Mr. President, that’s such a big step. To take that at an ordinary session, in the middle of a demonstration—

Nixon: What can we really offer them?

Kissinger: We can say—

Nixon: Figure something out.

Kissinger: Yeah. I’ll—

Nixon: Work on it—

Kissinger: —I’ll try to have something for you—

Nixon: Something that they can turn down, but something where—and let’s, and let’s just build it up. Give it to Scali and say, “Now, build the hell out of this thing.” That’s the way I want to do it, Henry.

Kissinger: Right. We can have some unilateral withdrawal for prisoners.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: We can—

Nixon: And don't let—incidentally, I'm really tired of Lodge, anyway. Goddammit, I sent him over there, fartin' around there with the Pope, and he comes in here on this thing and, now, he wants to take a trip to Vietnam. Goddammit, leave me alone!

Kissinger: Yes.

Nixon: He's never come in and showed any—he didn't—

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: When he was here last time, he didn't say anything about what the hell I've been doing. Where's he been? Why doesn't he stand up a little? I'm going to do this goddamn meeting; I'm going to get out of there. And I'm—don't you feel that way?

Kissinger: Absolutely.

Nixon: I mean, and the idea is, Henry [unclear]. You talk to him. He can tell you about it.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: Can he?

Kissinger: Oh, yes. He already has.

Nixon: Now, with regard to Dobrynin, I know that right now he's as tough as hell. Let me tell you why you've got to have the POW thing: it's purely a delaying action. Henry, [unclear] we've got to realize that we have got to keep them from running off. The POW wives may endorse this damn thing. You understand that?

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: It's too, too tantalizing for them. Bruce—we've got to indicate that we are at least doing something on POWs.

Kissinger: Actually, Mr. President, this Miller thing is—unless he's changed it—isn't such a bad one, oh, from that point of view. They—

Nixon: It says as soon as they're released?

Kissinger: They, first, have to release them, and a year afterwards, we'll withdraw our troops.

Nixon: A year afterwards?

Kissinger: It used to be a year.

Nixon: Or, nine months?

Kissinger: Well, maybe he's changed it to nine months, now.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: But that means they'd have to give up all their prisoners, first.

Nixon: Um-hmm. Well, we could almost buy that [unclear]—

Kissinger: Well, not yet.

Nixon: I mean—

Kissinger: You see, as soon as we've made the offer to them, Mr. President, and we know whether they'll buy it or not, then we can play it any way we want.

Nixon: I know. I know. But right now—

Kissinger: And it won't be a big deal until the result of it—

Nixon: —right now, let me say that we've got to put a stopper in the POWs stuff. That's the only thing that worries me at this time.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: The only thing.

Kissinger: I'll—

Nixon: And I don't think everybody around here is aware of that problem. You see—

Kissinger: Well, I'll have a suggestion—

Nixon: —because it's our Achilles heel. If those POW wives start running around, coming on to this general election, and veterans, you're in real—we are in troubles like you wouldn't—and you must tell all of them—

Kissinger: Well, let me talk to the leader of these wives. I know her.⁸ She was on national television the other day. She was very good. She is very fond of me.

Nixon: I know.

Kissinger: And I think—I quieted them down—

Nixon: I know, I know. But they—they're still worried, though—

Kissinger: Oh, they're def—

Nixon: [unclear] you just talk to them every day, you know, and they're, they're a worried bunch. Yeah?

[Omitted here is a brief, unrelated exchange with Stephen Bull.]

Nixon: Now, before we leave, you have advised that—just think about—understand: I'm just looking for a gimmick.

Kissinger: I know.

Nixon: I don't give a goddamn. I don't want to, Henry, to accept it, but don't assume when you talk to 'em—Colson⁹ is very close to it. There're a [unclear] number of groups Colson can use. Be sure you talk to them, too, to see what groups are ready to take off. You see?

Kissinger: Right.

⁸ Probably a reference to Carol North, then Chairman of the Board, National League of Families.

⁹ Charles W. Colson, Special Counsel to the President.

Nixon: To see that they're holding firm. See, Henry?

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: We—don't assume when you talk to one that you get them all, because there are about 18 different—like it's with veterans. We got 90 percent of the veterans—95 percent of the veterans, but 5 percent go around and give you hell. See?

Kissinger: Right. Right.

Nixon: I think we can hold 'em, but I think we've got to get it to them, and if we can make some kind of an offer, or even tell them that we are going to make an offer, fine. They have to get some assurance, Henry. They've got to get some assurance—

Kissinger: I—I'll talk to the wives—

Nixon: —on what they want to know.

Kissinger: What I should do—

Nixon: Don't assume the one woman, though. She's just one of many.

Kissinger: No—but I want to talk and get her advice, because I trust her. And then, I'll, I'll do—She's, she's tough enough. It isn't—I don't want to give the impression that she's easy, but she's been—

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: Let me talk to her, first. She was on national television the other day—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —and she was pretty firm.

Nixon: Well, we've got to have something new on POWs Thursday. It's got to sound new. That's all. Just put—have Bruce put something out, some gobbledygook. You know, take your pick. So that he—So that he just doesn't say, "We repeat our October 7th offer—" ¹⁰

Kissinger: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Nixon: Take the October 7th offer, refurbish it, take out the faulty ammo and put a little something in—

Kissinger: Right. I will have a suggestion for you first thing in the morning.

Nixon: Yeah. And then we'll have Bruce present it, and then we'll build it up in advance; say he's going to make an offer on POWs, and then say, "I offer to do this." And, for example, include in it—make it a comprehensive offer: we turn over the 10,000 people. We [unclear] the damn thing, you see—?

Kissinger: Right. Right. Right.

Nixon: That's what we have to do. That's the only thing we have to worry—realize: I don't give a damn about the Congress, demon-

¹⁰ See Document 46.

strators, or anything else, but I've got to keep the POW wives from taking off. They could really hurt us. The Congress would pass that so goddamned fast it'd make your head spin, Henry. I know this Congress. On that issue—they would not desert us on the others, but they'd desert us on that issue. See?

Kissinger: Well, I'll do my best by tomorrow to—

[Omitted here is discussion about Kissinger's upcoming meeting with Dobrynin.]

192. Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Senior Review Group¹

Washington, April 27, 1971, 3:05–4:34 p.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam Assessment

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

Mr. U. Alexis Johnson

Mr. William Sullivan

Mr. Arthur Hartman

Mr. Thomas Pickering

CIA

Mr. Richard Helms

Mr. Paul Walsh

Mr. George Carver

DOD

Mr. Warren Nutter

Maj. Gen. Fred Karhos

R. Adm. William R. Flanagan

JCS

Adm. Thomas H. Moorer

Brig. Gen. Adrian St. John

NSC Staff

Mr. Wayne Smith

Col. Richard T. Kennedy

Mr. W.R. Smyser

Mr. Robert L. Sansom

Mr. Morris F. Edmundson

Mr. Keith Guthrie

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-112, SRG Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Nodis. In an April 26 briefing memorandum to Kissinger, Kennedy and Holdridge explained that an SRG meeting was being called to "keep up the momentum of the Vietnam Assessment." (Ibid., Box H-57, SRG Meetings, Vietnam Assessment 4-27-71 (2 of 3)) In an April 28 memorandum for the record by Odeen, reporting on a meeting between Laird and his key Vietnam advisers, Nutter stated his opinion of the SRG meeting as "a pretty confused meeting. All sorts of extraneous topics were discussed and not much was accomplished." (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330-76-197, Box 79, Viet 092, Jan-May)

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. The SRG reviewed the study of enemy strategy alternatives prepared by CIA² and agreed that the analysis should be refined as follows:

a) Enemy manpower requirements for alternative strategies should be related to a meaningful U.S. withdrawal schedule and to planned U.S. air sortie rates.

b) An analysis of best, worst, and probable case enemy strategies should be prepared by JCS.

c) Force ratios should take into account South Vietnamese regional forces and such mobility of ARVN units as is feasible.

d) Measures to augment friendly main forces in MRs where deficits are anticipated should be thoroughly analyzed.

e) Possible alternative programs to increase the effectiveness of air interdiction operations and to harass enemy supply routes by ground operations will be examined.

2. The study of economic development prospects in Vietnam should be pushed forward on a priority basis to insure that it can be completed by the June 1 deadline.

3. A decision on future employment of Korean troops will be deferred pending receipt of the assessment of the need for these forces already requested from MACV.

4. State will submit a recently completed SNIE on the South Vietnamese political situation³ for White House review to see if it meets the requirement for a political study set forth in Dr. Kissinger's memorandum of April 15.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

² Helms forwarded CIA Intelligence Memorandum ER IM 71-72, "Hanoi's Options and Probable Strategy Choices During the Period From April 1971 Through December 1972," April 26, to Kissinger under a covering memorandum. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 154, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, 9 Apr 71-30 Apr 71)

³ Document 195.

193. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, April 28, 1971.

SUBJECT

High-Profile Move on POWs at April 29 Paris Talks

You have directed that high-profile move be undertaken by our Delegation to the Paris talks at the April 29 session.² At Tab A is a memorandum to you from Acting Secretary Irwin describing what will be done in Paris as a result of your directive.³ This will consist of:

—Providing quantification by our Delegation of the numbers of sick, wounded, and long-held prisoners of war which our side is willing to repatriate directly or intern in a mutually-agreed neutral third country.⁴ Initial GVN figures, which we hope can be increased, are 570 sick and wounded and 1200 POWs held over four years. This is the first time that quantification will have been made. Our side will call on the Communists to agree to a safe means for repatriation for the sick and wounded and to designate a third country for neutral internment.

—Noting that there has been no authoritative inspection of the other side's POW camps and that the Communists claim their men are maltreated in GVN camps, and following this up by proposing that both sides nominate impartial parties or governments to serve as protecting powers for the prisoners held by the two sides. This move will be the opening of an intensive campaign to gain access by organizations such as the ICRC and other appropriate groups or governments to prisoners held by the enemy in Southeast Asia. The fact that the ICRC has access to camps where North Vietnamese prisoners are held in South Vietnam, combined with the other side's claim of maltreatment of its prisoners, gives us leverage to work on the North Vietnamese.

I believe that these two moves, which are fully concurred in by the GVN, will accomplish your purpose. You have already endorsed

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 121, Vietnam Subject Files, Viet (POW), Vol. II. Secret; Nodis; Paris Meetings. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen." Holdridge forwarded it to Kissinger under an April 28 covering memorandum, and Haig initialed it for Kissinger.

² The directive was sent in telegram 72095 to Saigon and the delegation in Paris, April 27. (Ibid., Box 190, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, 7 Jan 71–1 Jul 71)

³ Attached but not printed is Irwin's memorandum, April 28.

⁴ In circular telegram 79180, May 7, the Department requested the recipients to approach host governments to see if they would agree to accept internees. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27–7 ASIA SE)

the direct repatriation or internment in a neutral country of sick and wounded and long-held POWs, and a follow-up is definitely in order. The quantification of numbers of prisoners in these categories held by us will provide further emphasis. Calling on Communists to join us in nominating protecting powers, while not being as attractive as repatriation or internment, should also generate considerable public attention and support. The ad hoc prisoner of war committee chaired by General Hughes should be able to assure that coordination can be effected in generating further publicity.

While Ambassador Bruce's statement⁵ will gain attention, we think you may wish to underline it further by making a statement of your own and by being prepared to answer questions on it at your press conference.

With this in mind, we have prepared the following:

—A brief statement for you to make (Tab B).⁶

—Questions and Answers for your press conference (Tab C).⁷

⁵ Bruce made the proposal at the 111th plenary session at Paris. The text is in Department of State *Bulletin*, May 17, 1971, pp. 633–635. In telegram 84898 to Saigon, May 15, the Department indicated that it would accept Radio Hanoi's announcement of allowing an unarmed vessel flying a Red Cross flag to repatriate the sick and wounded as North Vietnam's official acceptance. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27–7 VIET) The GVN announced on June 2 that only 13 internees had consented to repatriation after extensive interviews by the International Committee of the Red Cross. On June 3, Radio Hanoi announced that the North Vietnamese would not accept them and called the original offer an "ugly, deceptive trick." The prisoners were never released. (Davis, *A Bitter Lesson*, pp. 277–282)

⁶ Tab B is attached but not printed. Nixon incorporated the details into his response to a question at an April 29 press conference but did not read the statement verbatim. The text is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1971*, pp. 595–596.

⁷ Tab C, undated, is attached but not printed.

194. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)¹

Washington, April 29, 1971, 10:59 a.m.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

Further conversation

P: On this POW release—is this thing they offered in Paris just an agreement to release if they do likewise? If so, it's new.²

H: It's an offer unilaterally to release them. It's been done before.

P: It's a _____ release but if it's offered before why haven't we done it? Conditional?

H: Part of repatriation of wounded and others are a proposal to put them into a neutral area.

P: They don't want to go North?

H: A lot don't but we want a reciprocal action.

P: Neutral areas suggested before.

H: No, that's new.

P: Conditions on their responding in kind? Why different from exchanging POWs?

H: Easier way for the other side rather than turning them back to home country and more consistent with Geneva Accords.

P: So that I know what I am talking about—we will repatriate and return to neutral country if you do. Or regardless?

H: No, if reciprocal. Offer to return wounded we have done that.

P: Is that conditions on their return?

H: Done it unilaterally before and this is more.

P: We will return them anyway. 576 on a unilateral offer.

H: Put some across the DMZ. Turn them loose. Some may refuse to go. There is also evidence that there are communist _____ in camps pressuring men not to go. One didn't want to go back for fear of what will happen to them and now new evidence—

P: 576 sick and wounded being repatriated.

H: We have 430.

P: Americans. MIA is 1200?

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 998, Haig Chronological Files, Haig Telcons 1971 (2 of 2). No classification marking. All omissions are in the original.

² See Document 193.

H: We don't think there are too many of them. But that's the figure.

P: But people who are don't want to be forgotten.

H: Some held in SVN and some held in Laos.

P: 430 are in North.

H: Yes, sir.

P: 1200 is total year around figure? That includes 430?

H: Yes, sir.

P: SVN?

H: The estimate is very small.

P: If it's small, it's irrelevant. OK. I see—that's fine, thank you.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

H: We are in good shape. You are covered now. Today's—one problem coming up _____ that Burchett³ has assurances that our prisoners will be released within 15 days of a date certain. It's just beginning to move. He is a hack for Hanoi and Peking. It means Henry's project will have to move fast. We haven't heard from them but we need to talk with them officially and they will spread that story.

P: Henry doesn't see the significance. Putting yourself in our position—They will play on the prisoners. They say they will release prisoners on a date certain and a lot of Americans will say let's do it. Pass it to Henry. Nothing I can do on that is there?

H: No, I hope to hear.

P: The deliberation usually pays off but we have time blowing on our backs hard and the military like all of us think you cannot trade prisoners for defeat but many would. Especially POW wives. You are keeping in touch with them through Hughes?

H: Yes, sir.

P: Tell them we are keeping it in mind.

H: It should help them today. Nothing earthshaking but a new formulation.

P: There's nothing Henry can do about it. Except moving up of the date. Everything really has to be moved up as soon as we can. The idea that we will meander to Paris—that's why I said just give them one date.

H: It's going to build in the next couple of weeks.

P: POW issue?

³ Wilfred Burchett was an Australian journalist with close ties to the North Vietnamese.

H: Yes. Speculation on it. We have to make sense of how we can reach it until we talk with these people. If they accept it we have something.

P: The main thing—you have to let the POW leaders in on the game. I can't hold them otherwise. We have told them to wait and we are negotiating. But it may be that we have cried wolf too often.

H: We can hold them if the other side doesn't say something to upset them. If they say what Burchett is saying officially it will upset them.

P: If they say release prisoners in 15 days we are hard pressed. What does Henry say?

H: We have the ceasefire to work into it. He and Bunker think that Thieu would accept a reasonable date—a year from Sept. would be attractive.

P: That may be too late. It's awfully close to election date. It will look like that. Maybe June or July. It's now a point whether it's or it's not irrelevant. The worst thing for Thieu is to _____ and have us tossed out on our _____. Congress can cut money. That's a danger he doesn't recognize and Henry doesn't either.

H: That could happen.

P: You can't _____ at Congress—and they will follow POWs. It's a tough one. We have to get going fast. The whole timetable has to be accelerated.

195. National Intelligence Estimate¹

NIE 53–71

Washington, April 29, 1971.

SOUTH VIETNAM: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

[Omitted here are the cover page and table of contents.]

Note

The US military presence in South Vietnam will be reduced to about 185,000 by the end of 1971 and even further by the end of 1972.

¹ Source: Central Intelligence Agency, NIC Files; Job 79–R01012A, NIE 53–71, South Vietnam: Problems and Prospects 4/29/71. Secret; Sensitive. The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State and Defense, and the NSA participated in the preparation of this estimate. It was submitted with the concurrence of all members of the USIB except the representatives of the AEC and FBI who abstained on the grounds that it was outside their jurisdiction.

But it is assumed in this paper that a US military support effort will be maintained beyond 1972 along with substantial amounts of US economic assistance. As the US disengages militarily, however, the non-communist forces in South Vietnam will face the test of dealing with a variety of challenges largely on their own. This Estimate assesses the major problems which will confront the Saigon government in the future as the US reduces its presence and which, depending on how they are met, will largely determine South Vietnam's prospects through the mid-1970s.

Conclusions

A. The outlook in South Vietnam for the remainder of 1971 is reasonably good. The past three years have produced a more stable political situation, a marked improvement in security conditions, and considerable progress in Vietnamization. Meanwhile, communist problems in supporting the insurgency have mounted. Though communist military strength remains substantial, particularly in the northerly provinces, most of the available evidence suggests that—for the next six months or so—they will continue to rely essentially on the basically conservative tactics observed over the past year. While occasional spurts of larger scale military activity seem almost certain, particularly in the north, any such activity in South Vietnam would probably be limited in area and duration.

B. On the political front, the odds in the presidential election of October 1971 appear to favor a Thieu victory. His re-election would, of course, constitute a mandate for continuing to oppose the communists along present lines. But even the election of the more equivocal "Big" Minh would not necessarily lead to any major shift in Saigon's approach to the struggle, if only because the South Vietnamese military would compel Minh to be extremely circumspect in any dealings with the communists. As for Hanoi, the defeat of Thieu would provide a tempting opportunity to feel out South Vietnamese sentiment on continuing the war.

C. Prospects for 1972 are less clear. The approaching US election period, coupled with continued drawdowns of US troop strength in South Vietnam, make it probable that Hanoi will elect to step up its military activity by early 1972. We do not envisage an effort to duplicate in scale or intensity the 1968 Tet offensive. We would expect a general increase in the level of communist activity with sharp focus on a few selected areas, most likely the northern provinces and highland region of South Vietnam. The aim of this strategy would be to score tactical victories likely to impact adversely on the South Vietnamese and US will to persist in the struggle—specifically, to discredit the Vietnamization program and to encourage sentiment in the US for com-

plete disengagement from the war. There are practical limits, however, to what the communists could accomplish militarily next year in South Vietnam, and we do not believe that they will be able to reverse the military balance there.

D. At the same time, there seems little doubt that the communists will continue to maintain an active military and political challenge to the GVN well beyond 1972. The question in their mind is how and at what level the campaign should be prosecuted. Much would depend on Hanoi's view of the remaining US presence and commitment to Saigon, and on what balance Hanoi struck in its willingness to continue investing resources in the struggle. There are risks and practical difficulties in any course which Hanoi might contemplate: an effort to exploit the drawdown of US forces by a return to large-scale military action; to continue a course not unlike that of the past two years; or to pursue a purely guerrilla struggle at a much lower level. In any case, as it views developments in Laos and Cambodia, Hanoi may well calculate that it can maintain forces on South Vietnamese borders as long as necessary to sap Saigon's will to continue the struggle.

E. In attempting to cope with the communist military threat, South Vietnamese forces will probably require substantial US support for many years. ARVN lacks the logistical system and technological and managerial skills required to maintain and support a modern fighting force. There are also serious personnel problems, including a shortage of qualified leaders and a propensity for enlisted ranks to desert. Problems of leadership and morale are even more severe in the territorial forces and village militia, key elements in the campaign to control the countryside.

F. A major element in Hanoi's ability to stay the course in South Vietnam is the apparent durability of the communist party apparatus there. The apparatus has been hurt, severely in some areas, but relatively few high-level communist cadres have been eliminated as a result of direct GVN action against them. The communists have been able to maintain a viable organization, and this is likely to continue to be the case for the foreseeable future.

G. In addition to the threat posed by the communists, the GVN will have to cope with internal problems. These include meeting the increased demands of a society in the process of change. A greatly enlarged urban slum population has been created and is a target for radical agitation, while the rural populace looks increasingly to the government to meet its growing needs. In the economic sphere, the GVN simply will not be able to satisfy the demands of this "revolution of rising expectations" from its own resources. The political impact of the changing South Vietnamese society is less easily defined. But the regime is likely to find itself faced with rising nationalism, often manifested as anti-Americanism. In the future, there is also likely to be

a shift toward a more traditional Vietnamese pattern of a centralized executive authority, although the major elements of the present constitutional system are likely to be retained. Such a system might result in a more efficient government, but the regime might also rely increasingly on its coercive powers, thereby leading to instability and risking political disintegration.

H. Over the longer term, a critical factor in South Vietnam's survival will be the will of the South Vietnamese as a people and as a nation to sustain the struggle against the communists. As Vietnamization proceeds, the South Vietnamese will have to cope with the communists and face the country's problems largely on their own. Developments thus far suggest that they are responding reasonably well to the challenge. But there is no way to determine how tenacious they will be a few years hence when the US is much further along the road to disengagement.

I. Thus, it is impossible at this time to offer a clear-cut estimate about South Vietnam's prospects through the mid-1970s. There are many formidable problems and no solid assurances over this period of time. In our view, the problems facing the GVN, the uncertainties in South Vietnam about the magnitude, nature, and duration of future US support, doubts concerning the South Vietnamese will to persist, the resiliency of the communist apparatus in South Vietnam, and North Vietnam's demonstrated ability and willingness to pay the price of perseverance are such that the longer term survival of the GVN is by no means yet assured.

[Omitted here is the body of the estimate.]

196. Memorandum From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to President Nixon¹

Washington, May 3, 1971.

SUBJECT

U.S. Battle Deaths—Week of April 25–May 1

As anticipated, U.S. battle deaths in Southeast Asia during the past week were relatively low, with only 17 deaths during this period re-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 154, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 1 May–31 May 71. Confidential. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

flected in the weekly casualty figure. However, a figure of 68 will be reported on Thursday because 51 casualties carried as MIA during previous weeks were identified this week as battle deaths.²

I have discussed with Secretary Laird's office the unsatisfactory circumstances which this method of determining weekly casualties poses for us. They were equally disturbed by the disproportionate carry-overs reflected in this week's reporting. But after analyzing the implications of trying to space out U.S. battle deaths over a period of weeks, they concluded, correctly I believe, that any change in existing procedures would soon surface and open up the whole question of the credibility of our casualty reporting. Defense believes we must take the heat for the high number this week in anticipation that there will be a drop-off in U.S. battle deaths in the weeks to come.³

² Nixon highlighted the last sentence and drew a line to the bottom of the page where he wrote, "Is it just a coincidence that all 51 were reported the week of the demonstration—rather than $\frac{1}{2}$ one week and $\frac{1}{2}$ another?" Nixon's reference is to a major peace protest that was set to begin on May 4.

³ Nixon highlighted this sentence and wrote "OK" next to it.

197. Conversation Among President Nixon, his Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig), and the White House Chief of Staff (Haldeman)¹

Washington, May 6, 1971.

Nixon: I think that, Al, we're going to have to come—to plan that trip on the 8th. You know, the Thieu trip.²

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: Now, let me tell you the problem here. First, we've got to have a significant movement by that time on the Vietnam front. We have got to do that, or something else. Henry says there's a very remote possibility, now, to grab it, so, we won't do it unless he's—we're

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 493–10. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. This exchange is part of a larger conversation, 11 a.m.–12:10 p.m.

² See footnote 7, Document 191.

ready to do it—until we're ready to start that meeting. He's just got to see if that can't be pulled off. See, if you could announce that, then I could put the other trip off 'til the end of June, because I don't want to do the two together. But, assuming it's out the window, then I have to have that. Now, Henry's arguments against doing it then, of course, relate to his little Mickey Mouse game of going over to Paris and seeing those fellows, and so forth and so on. I have no, no illusions about that [unclear]. First of all, I asked him—it may be they may not see him. Second, if they do, they're just going to diddle him along, and, and we're not going to do that this time. This is going to be an ultimatum, as far as I'm concerned—

Haig: That's right, sir. Well, I think that's—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: —Henry's thinking.

Nixon: Well, but the point is, I mean, he says that if they have two meetings, they're gonna push it past the 8th. He's not going to have two meetings. I mean, he's going to say, "We're going to have an understanding in this regard," and then he can give it three days, or four days, or whatever the case is.

But, the idea that we will wait and have to have them screw around in those meetings in Paris again, is just not going to happen again. There's going to be—it's a—the—he said two meetings. The second meeting is for the purpose of finishing.

Haig: That's right.

Nixon: There ain't going to be—there's not going to be another one for the purpose of haggling around. Because they—there is really nothing in that record, the previous record, Al, to indicate that any progress was made in those talks.

Haig: No.

Nixon: Now, there isn't. I've read them, and there isn't a goddamn thing. And, the way Xuan Thuy is talking, and all the rest, I don't think they—I don't think there's a chance, really. I think there's very little chance. Henry feels, I know, that because of the Chinese move, that they're worrying, because, maybe, the—the Russians may be doing it, and so forth. That's all gobbledygook. That's a guess. Maybe. Maybe there is; maybe there isn't. But, it's either fish or cut bait now.

Haig: Well, we have to have a record, sir. You have to have a record of proposing a fixed withdrawal date, and it being turned down—

Nixon: Sure. That record will be made, and then we'll go. But, Henry's feeling was—and I talked to him last night—that we'd make the record, and then, if they had turned it down, then I'd just announce that I'd made the offer. That isn't enough. [unclear] We have to have

by the 8th of June³—we’ve got to have something more than an offer of the fact that we’ve offered a date, and a cease-fire, and the rest. That was a—That’s—That’s a—That’s a nice little thing to offer, and it’ll be a two-day story. So, I—My, my thinking, now, is that we’ve got to, we’ve got to make our preliminary plans in terms of the 8th, having in mind the fact that if anything should develop in Paris then we’ll push it off—if it should. The Chinese thing shouldn’t—it has nothing to do with it; absolutely nothing to do with it. I mean, if—whatever happens on that will, will just be a dividend. Or it’ll have no—it’ll not change the situation. We’re going to do the China thing for other reasons. But, I, I just don’t want any of you, Al, to [unclear]. We can haggle around through the summer. I mean, you’ve got the Chinese game, and we’ve got the Soviet game, and we’ve got the, the other game, and so forth and so on. Because I know the domestic game at this point. At the present time, we have got to move decisively [unclear] for domestic reasons. Not, not to—we’re not—we’re not going to change in terms of withdrawal, or anything like that, but we’ve got to move on the Thieu meeting if we’re going to. If that’s going to be our big announcement for the summer, get it over with and get it over fast, because that’s the only way you can stop. See, Henry has no, no concern or, certainly, no understanding of the situation in the Senate. Now, the votes are going to start coming around the 8th, 9th, and 10th. We’ll have one in the House next week on the appropriations bill with a terminal date. The Senate votes are the ones I’m concerned about.⁴ I’ve got to have something; something more than simply, “Well, and—well, we offered the South Vietnamese—or the North Vietnamese, a terminal date, we’ve got a date.” You know what I mean. It won’t be that way in a cease-fire, and so forth, but it’s too complicated. It’s a good offer, I mean. I agree, and Stuart Alsop will understand it, Chalmers Roberts and a few others, but the guys up there that are—will not. So, on the other hand, the announcement from—after meeting with Thieu, the American combat role ends at a certain time, that’ll have some impact. Right?

Haldeman: Sure.

Nixon: [unclear] my view.

Haldeman: That’s just an offer that’s turned down.

Nixon: Well, now look. Here’s the point—

³ When Nixon expected to meet with Thieu on Midway Island.

⁴ Nixon’s reference is to resolutions currently before Congress. (See “New Public Hearings Before Sen. Fulbright’s Committee: A Variety of End-the-War Resolutions,” *The New York Times*, April 26, 1971, page A22)

Haldeman: Except that—

Nixon: We have offered everything else. I noted already that—we all know the technical difference. That here, we are not—that here, we are separating out the political settlement, we're separating out the element of the China peace conference, and, and we are saying, "As of a date certain, if you'll give us a cease-fire and release our prisoners, we'll be out." That's new, and we all know that it's new. And it's very significant. We all know it's very significant. But, Al, to the average person in the country, that's just another [unclear] gobbledegook like the one we made before. See?

Haig: Well, it's not going to mean anything, no.

Nixon: See? You make my point.

Haig: That—

Nixon: You see, what they need, now, is something, Al. We've got to have something that means something to domestic people, here. That, that, that's—that's why the, the Thieu vote, if we don't have another vote, has got to be thrown—shot on the 8th. And the other vote isn't going to come out of Paris in my opinion. I don't know.

[Omitted here is discussion of SALT and China.]

Nixon: Then the summit thing, if something comes on that, it could have an effect. It could be a big play in early June, if they're ready to announce it. But, if not, then let it go. Then, we might only have only one ball left, at this time, in the political field, and that's the meeting with Thieu, and the combat troop thing. And that would help. But it would have to come June 8th. If it comes later in the month, it could be—it would be past the votes, and I would hate like hell to go over and have a meeting with him and announce that no more combat troops are going to be there after the Senate had voted a terminal date. See my point? I don't want to have actions taken which appear to be in reaction to duress, or to the Senate. And the—That's why the Thieu thing very well may have to be the 8th, because there could god-well be an action in the Senate, which—it's hard to phrase all this very well, now, because we can't tell what their reactions will be to the recent demonstrations, and the rest. And some of them may start to harden up a bit, and maybe the House will be better next week than we [unclear] thought, but—but, it's really the Senate we're worried about. But—but I do know, I do know this: that, now, it's a cold turkey proposition. We've either got to have something solid, or—on—the only things that will affect us are: one, the meeting with Thieu, since we've ruled out the draft thing. Don't even think—don't even bother with it, now, until it's—before the school year begins. Then, you can try it again. The meeting with Thieu can have a—have an effect, provided it has that announcement, with that announcement I'm going to meet with him. The second thing is the announcement of the summit, or an an-

nouncement that we're meeting with the Chinese. On—those are the only things that can have any effect on the Congressional situation. See, that will really hit 'em, it will hit with a great shock. The other things—SALT—will help some sophisticated people.

[Omitted here is discussion of SALT.]

Nixon: Now, the other thing, of course, that I thought of, was that in view of their turn down of our prisoner thing, you know what I mean? Normal reaction was that it was—that it would have been a hell of a good time to, to hit those three passes in North Vietnam. But, on the other hand, since he has this damn offer hanging out there—I want to get that over with for that reason, too, Al.

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: You understand, with Henry bouncing back and forth with Paris and those goddamn trips, I mean, that'll—they'd like to string it along, because they know very well that we don't do anything when those—when that's going on. We're going to hit 'em. I mean, they can't turn down an offer like that, and they can't make some of the jackass statements they make without paying some consequences, and that's the only thing we've got left. We're just about ready to hit 'em again, so I—so they—see, that's another reason for you, when you're talking to Henry, must be pressing Thieu. I mean, we—look, we can't diddle any more. That's the whole point.

Haig: Exactly.

Nixon: We've got to cut the diddling. Oh, the idea that, well, we can't do this, or that, or the other thing, because of the fact that it might disturb our talks with the Chinese; it might disturb our talks with the Russians; or it might disturb what talks we might have with the South—North Vietnamese. Just let me say: all that really matters is the talk that's going on in that Senate at the present time.

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: Therefore, what we have to do is what we have to do: we have to, now, pose our actions in a way that will not destroy any of these talks—and they don't need them to—but that don't, but that don't—frankly, if you think anything's going to disturb our talks just have the goddamn Senate pass something like that. Right?

Haig: Right.

Nixon: Well then, where's your bargaining position then?

Haig: I don't know.

Nixon: If the Congress says, "Well, get out of there the 31st of June," in December, right? Suppose they cut your money? What do you do then? Then what's happened to Vietnam? Am I right? See, this is what—

Haig: [unclear]

Nixon: This is the—this is a factor we've now got to start thinking about. We've—we're coming right under the wire, and we're coming in pretty good shape. We're—we've fought a long battle, and we can win it. But, right now, we've got to shoot our bullets and shoot them in good enough time, even though it presses us a little bit.

Haig: That's right, sir.

Nixon: That's why I probably am going to have to go on the 8th if you can't get—since you can't get the draft thing. We have to go on the 8th and [unclear] arguing against it, but what else can you do?

Haig: No, I—I think the draft thing is going to be—

Nixon: It can't be done, I know. [unclear] But let's leave it out for the moment. Leave the draft out, but, assuming the draft can't be done—let's base all our assumptions on that—do you have anything else we could do before the 8th? You see, on the 8th—the week of the 8th—

Haig: Sir, I—I—

Nixon: The only other thing coming up is SALT.

[Omitted here is discussion of SALT, China, and the Moscow summit.]

Nixon: So, I'm inclined to think that the June 8th measures—let's [unclear] it. Now, we've got to do this in terms of, of attitude, and as far as Henry's plans are concerned, that interferes with another trip he's going to take to Paris. Forget it. Let him take his trip and go back again. If that interferes with when he's to go to Pakistan, just go out. You know, people—

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: There's no problem—no problem with that. Nothing has to be foreseen.

[Omitted here is discussion of SALT.]

Nixon: But I do say that we have to do something—

Haig: We have to get—

Nixon: —tangible on, on Vietnam. And since we don't have—if we can't do it with regard to the draftee thing, then we'll have to move the Thieu thing up to the 8th. That'll work. And that's—that's good enough. It's the best we've got. It'll help.

Haig: A little bit of a mixed package with Thieu's visit. The—they'll be—

Nixon: [unclear]

Haig: The doves will say that you're propping up his election, too.

Nixon: That's right.

Haig: That's—that's one of the criticisms we'll get.

Nixon: I guess you will. So, we will. But he wants to come over. Let's say that, look, if he, after that, announces that he will assume the

full combat responsibility at a certain time, that's pretty goddamn good news, isn't it?

Haig: I think it's very good. I think it'll help.

Haldeman: [unclear] you're not being accused of propping up the Thieu Government, because you are.

Nixon: And, Al, that's accurate—

Haig: [unclear]

Nixon: —and everybody thinks we're propping up the goddamn Thieu Government, and I don't think—I just think we just, just—just do it and do it well. That's the point. Good God, you'd have thought we were propping up [unclear].

Haig: You can talk about, at that meeting, also, about the peaceful development of Vietnam later. [unclear]

Nixon: The most important thing is that announcement, though. If we can get the, if we can get the—If we can get the SALT thing, that will set a warmer climate for the Thieu visit and everything else that comes among the intellectuals. I agree with that. But then, don't let, don't let the little junket to Paris. I—I mean, that's the one thing I [unclear]

Haig: I don't see anything.

Nixon: Look, Al—

Haig: I never have.

Nixon: Yeah. Henry has been too bullish [unclear] he thinks that—as you know, as he's said, because of the Chinese thing and the Russian—particularly the Chinese thing—he thinks there's a 50 percent chance, now, that maybe they'll talk. They aren't going to talk. Why the hell should they?

Haig: No.

Nixon: We're going to get out anyway. You see my point?

Haig: And they read. They read our problems here, too—

Nixon: Yeah. Oh, sure. He talks about 'em.

198. Memorandum From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to President Nixon¹

Washington, May 7, 1971.

SUBJECT

Situation in Long Tieng in Northern Laos

CIA has informed us that the CIA Station Chief in Vientiane believes the situation in the Long Tieng area of Northern Laos, while still serious, is not critical at this time. One North Vietnamese regiment has been badly mauled and is pulling away from Long Tieng, and the remaining units of the 312th and 316th NVA divisions in the general vicinity are under strength. Enemy capabilities have thus been affected.

On the other hand, the situation among the Long Tieng defenders has improved. The energy and enthusiasm displayed by General Dhep, the Thai Commander, have raised morale considerably among the Thai irregulars. Morale is better today than at the beginning of April. This in turn has had a favorable effect on the morale of General Vang Pao and his Meo troops. The Meo performance is now the best in several months.

While it is still possible that the enemy may try to launch one more major attack on Long Tieng before the rainy season begins about mid-May, the strength of the defenders is greater than that of the 4500 enemy troops deployed in the immediate Long Tieng area. If an attack comes, it might be on the birthday of Ho Chi Minh, which is May 19. Even without an attack, the enemy will probably try to maintain positions in and around the Plain of Jars through the rainy season to provide a head start for the next dry season offensive. Nevertheless, Generals Dhep and Vang Pao believe that the Long Tieng situation has been stabilized for the moment and they are beginning to think in terms of offensive action of their own beginning in June.

Comment: Hopefully the CIA assessment is correct. The situation at Long Tieng today is very reminiscent of what it was this time last year, when the North Vietnamese as well as the Long Tieng defenders

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 549, Country Files, Far East, Laos Vol. VII, Part 2. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. Holdridge sent it to Haig under a May 5 covering memorandum, recommending that he sign it. He noted that it was a summary of the latest ERAWAN report. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

were showing signs of wear and tear. The North Vietnamese, though, are at the end of a much more difficult logistics system. If Long Tieng does succeed in holding out, the crucial factor will clearly be the Thai troops, both regular and irregular, who have been sent in during the past year.

199. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, May 10, 1971.

SUBJECT

The Post-Lam Son Mood in Hanoi

The Canadian ICC Commissioner's report of an early April surface mood in Hanoi of confidence, heightened morale, and conviction in ultimate victory is consistent with other information we have on the mood which was generated in Hanoi after Lam Son 719.

At the end of the Laos operation, Hanoi launched a massive propaganda campaign depicting this battle as a great Communist victory. This campaign has no doubt had some success with the North Vietnamese population. The Hanoi leaders too probably regarded the ARVN's withdrawal as a victory, at least initially, despite the high costs.

It is interesting to note, however, that Soviet Bloc military attachés in Hanoi reportedly were willing to accept the view that Lam Son 719 was as much an ARVN victory as a Communist one. The extent to which this more sophisticated assessment is shared by the Hanoi leadership is not known.

There is, however, some sign that heavy Communist losses in Laos and a subsequent lack of progress on the battlefield have produced some sobering afterthoughts. A recently broadcast article by COSVN's chief political officer painted an unusually grim picture of the present "extremely difficult" Communist battlefield situation and candidly admitted widespread morale and logistic problems.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 154, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 1 May–31 May 71. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen." Holdridge forwarded it to Kissinger under a May 7 covering memorandum in which he noted that it was a response to Nixon's query about reports on the DRV's mood. Haig signed for Kissinger.

200. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, May 10, 1971.

Kissinger: On the Vietnamese, on Hanoi, Mr. President, I think we might seriously consider the following: that, if they come back with an unsatisfactory reply, that we just drop it. And that you might consider this Howard K. Smith idea of going to Congress and make the whole proposal. And you could say, which would be true, that, on January 8th, we, in effect, told them through the Russians² that we would be willing to set a deadline if they gave a cease-fire. I did suggest to Dobrynin the general—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —outline of it as a—in a somewhat vaguer way, but it was clear enough. They then said they—they waited for two months before they replied and said they're willing to talk. We offered to talk, and they didn't talk, so we're making it public. Make it as a public offer, and then we'll be on record. I—I think we have to find some way of going on the offensive on this issue instead of always defending ourselves.

Nixon: Well, yeah, we have to for other reasons, too. But the—since we don't have the draft thing, the only thing now we can do in Vietnam is to meet Thieu and have the combat thing.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Unless he does that [unclear]—

Kissinger: If he does that, there's no problem.

Nixon: The other thing is that—

Kissinger: But that, by itself, isn't all that—

Nixon: But the other thing—

Kissinger: —tremendous.

Nixon: —it is something.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: It's something.

[Omitted here is discussion of SALT.]

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 496–9. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. This exchange is part of a larger conversation, 12:57–1:30 p.m. The Nixon tape log mistakenly dates this conversation May 19.

² Kissinger is referring to his January 9 meeting with Dobrynin; see Document 101.

Nixon: The other thing is that I think in this, in terms of Vietnam, it doesn't mean anything, Henry, particularly just to put up some offer. And, it might mean something to put up the offer of the—what would be the date of it? And would we do it this week?

Kissinger: A deadline? No—

Nixon: Well, this week, we would make that offer—We would reveal the thing this week. [unclear]—

Kissinger: No, I would do it after you've seen Thieu—in June sometime, by the middle of June.

Nixon: Al thinks that we've got to do something before the end of June, because we have—and the Congress, imposing this on us before we can see him. That's the problem with Congress. They—the Cooper–Church, McGovern–Hatfield, and all the rest. We'll fight it off. But [unclear]. See, that's the real problem we've got is that we have to have some play to make, to make in order to keep the Congress from making a move which will completely destroy what little margin is left. Now, my view is that, too, that we ought to—that we've got to move with regard to general action from them. [unclear] we pretty well have got to move the Bruce thing. The difficulty with moving on the Bruce thing is that then we have removed one of the arguments for not setting a deadline on negotiations. So, what the hell else have we got, besides the deadline while we protect Americans? In other words, it's too—it's the only thing that we're sure that we can do is to have a meeting with Thieu in June, and after that, to have an—to reveal that thing, to make an offer of negotiation, publicly, for a deadline, ceasefire, and prisoners—

Kissinger: And return of prisoners.

Nixon: Prisoners.

Kissinger: Ask the Congress to support it. I'm coming to the view, Mr. President, mainly colored by the fact that I've seen so many right-wingers out there—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: But Haig told me he talked to the agricultural people on my behalf on Friday.³ There was only one question on Vietnam. I—If I heard a hundred times out on the west coast, "Why won't the President get up and fight these people? Why does he keep turning the other cheek?" That we may wind up in a—

Nixon: They think we're caving in to the students?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: On what?

³ May 7.

Kissinger: On—

Nixon: Demonstrations, you mean?

Kissinger: Well, not on demonstrations, so much. I mean, I had a long conversation with Reagan on, on Saturday who was [unclear]⁴

Nixon: Who does he think we're turning it to? That's the point.

Kissinger: Well, no, Reagan made a—well, he made a point that was actually not so bad. He said he listened to your television speech on April 7th,⁵ and he said the end of it was superlative.

Nixon: Hmm.

Kissinger: The body of it, he said he thought, was too defensive. I'm—I'm just giving you his reaction.

Nixon: Um-hmm. Well, that's the reaction of the Right, yeah?

Kissinger: And, a number of people who are not as far Right as he is—

Nixon: I mean, we thought the body was pretty strong, you know?

Kissinger: That's right. Right—

Nixon: Well, most of the people back here wrote that it was strong. They, they were—

Kissinger: Oh, yes. Yes.

Nixon: So, you see, it shows you, though, that there's a hell of a lot of people in the country that want you to move a little further.

Kissinger: I'm not—

Nixon: Yes?

Kissinger: This wouldn't have been my view—

Nixon: But, it's—it's important, you know.

Kissinger: But I've been really struck out there by—

Nixon: It's good to be out there, isn't it?

Kissinger: Yeah. First of all, how much support you've got—

Nixon: [unclear] people.

Kissinger: How much support you've got.

Nixon: We've got some.

[Omitted here is discussion of U.S.-Soviet relations and SALT.]

Nixon: Coming back to this, the Russian thing, the other play we have to do is on Vietnam. See, that's the game, though. Let's forget the Russian thing and the rest at the present time. The game is where it is. All that matters here is Vietnam, though. Well, it seems to me, all we've got to play is the combat role, but what about making the offer sooner?

⁴ No further record has been found.

⁵ See Document 174.

Kissinger: I think it would bring Thieu down. I think the way to do it is to [unclear].

Nixon: All right, that's a reason not to do it. In other words, you don't think we can sell it to Thieu?

Kissinger: I think you can sell it to Thieu, but no one else.

Nixon: I have to tell him we're going to offer a cease-fire, and—but we wouldn't do it there.

Kissinger: No, you'd do it as soon as you—within a week of coming back.

Nixon: After he goes back, and we do it simultaneously?

Kissinger: Yes. Something may come out of this Le Duan visit to Moscow, Mr. President. It's three weeks—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —and that—they may be getting ready to settle it. I've still—a three-week visit for the leading North Vietnamese in Russia—

Nixon: Maybe he's sick?

Kissinger: No. It's highly unusual. In fact, four weeks he's stayed on after the Party Congress. He's never left, and—

Nixon: Is he the big man?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: You consider him to be one?

Kissinger: Yeah, he's the Party—he's the number one man.

Nixon: I think that's one way, but then, let's understand: the least we have to do is to go there. I mean, we planned to go to—let's just plan to go to Midway on the 8th.

Kissinger: I think that's a good idea—

Nixon: I—see, we've got to start planning that, now.

Kissinger: I—I've thought about it all last week—

Nixon: We'll go on the 8th, and let's get it done. And then—

Kissinger: In fact, there's a lot to be said to get—

Nixon: And then it's early, before the election.

Kissinger: —to do it before. It's good to have it before the election; it's good to have it in a way before the Chinese answer.

Nixon: I know. Coming just two years after Vietnamization and making the announcement that the American combat role will end on—What is it? What's he going to say? The 1st of December? The 1st of January—?

Kissinger: Yeah. End of this troop withdrawal, the first of December.

Nixon: Yeah. Well, we could make it spring pretty soon.

Kissinger: Oh yeah. And then, if a week later, you come up with a—

Nixon: What were the casualties this week?

Kissinger: Thirty-two.

Nixon: I thought they'd be down.

Kissinger: Cut in half—

Nixon: I mean, I thought they'd be lower than that.

Kissinger: Thirty-two is pretty low. Once you get below—

Nixon: Fifty?

Kissinger: Fifty, it's really—

Nixon: Forty? [unclear]

Kissinger: That's cut in half—

Nixon: There's still probably some carryovers from—

Kissinger: Yes.

Nixon: —helicopter pilots, the poor guys. That's one bit of good news, isn't it?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: All right. Then, in the other part—so, that's the Vietnam. In the meantime, Henry, we've got to keep our goddamned troops in the Senate. Do you notice, for example, if you read the weekend news summary, that all these people are, you know, yelling around about what they're going to do, and this, or that. Or [Senator Frank] Church says the shared responsibility with the House—with the Congress, you know. Responsibility? You know what they're petrified at?

Kissinger: That you'll succeed.

Nixon: We'll end the goddamn war and blame—and say, "We ended it, they started it."

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: And that's exactly what we're going to do.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: I think—I think we can beat them on that issue. I think—but, provided we keep one step ahead. Now, unfortunately, I was hoping we'd have a SALT thing. Let's assume we don't have it. Let's assume we don't have a summit thing. That means we just—I think, at the very least, we've got to figure that what we've got, we're going to have a June 8th announcement, and then we've got to come back with another announcement of a new negotiating offer and our final negotiating offer. Right?

Kissinger: Right—

Nixon: And we make it publicly?

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: What date would you put?

Kissinger: I'd put September 1st, '72. Well, I don't think that makes a hell—

Nixon: I don't think it makes a lot of difference. They're not going to take it.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: Cease-fire, and all the rest. I'd make it July 1st. If you put it September 1st it looks like you're doing it just before the election, and for the election. See my point?

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: I think it's—I think you got to move [unclear]. Well, you don't have to negotiate too much. We've got to sell Thieu on it. Just say, "Let's do it July 1st," and then see what happens.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: He knows goddamn well we're not going to agree. You know, on the prisoner thing, their attitude is a cold-blooded deal. They're not going to do a damn thing on prisoners. You know why? They know they've got us by the balls.

Kissinger: But—no, they're going to use the prisoners. As soon as we give a deadline, they'll insist that we stop military—

Nixon: You don't want to—You don't think we, we should consider any more bombing at the present time?

Kissinger: I think we should consider it, seriously.

Nixon: As of now?

Kissinger: Wait 'til we get their answer.

Nixon: And the answer from Dobrynin—

Kissinger: We will get an answer this week from Hanoi.

Nixon: You think so? Why didn't you get it this—last week?

Kissinger: Well, they—

Nixon: They—they're away, you say—?

Kissinger: Now, they had told us—they, up to now, they've not been—they have said, right away, they almost certainly couldn't do it on May 9th because Xuan Thuy would be out of town, and they might have to propose the 16th. Now, I believe, Mr. President, if they do propose the 16th, I should not go on that—such short notice. I should, then, suggest the 23rd.

Nixon: Only one problem: I'd go the 16th. There's a reason for it is that the reason is that—

Kissinger: They'll have made the offer.

Nixon: Look, we want to get it done. We've got to. We've got a lot of things we've got to do, and right now it's a race against time with us. That's what we have to realize. We don't want do anything that's wrong, but the 16th and 23rd—we can't diddle along, just [unclear].

Kissinger: Well, it depends when they come back, Mr. President. It's—they didn't come today.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: I think if they came on Wednesday,⁶ for me to come on three days notice to Paris is a—is something to which they'd be very sensitive. But they may not propose to see me. Let's see what they propose—if they propose anything. They may refuse a meeting.

Nixon: You haven't heard anything. I don't think they'll give it. They might not even answer at all.

Kissinger: No, but then, we're in great shape.

Nixon: Well, [unclear]. In other words, we made an offer, and they refused.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: Bruce, he made an offer and they refused in all the private meetings and the rest. They've been hurt by Laos, and the rest, despite everything they tell him—

Kissinger: Oh, yeah. Or—and, of course, they think they've got us on the run with all these demonstrations, which they're misreading.

[Omitted here is discussion of domestic policies, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China.]

⁶ May 12.

201. Conversation Among President Nixon, his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and the White House Chief of Staff (Haldeman)¹

Washington, May 13, 1971.

[Omitted here is a brief discussion of Korea.]

Nixon: Cambodia² was right.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 498–2. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. This exchange is part of a larger conversation, 9:28–10:03 a.m.

² Nixon is referring to the Cambodian incursion, the American-South Vietnamese sweep into Cambodia that began on April 29, 1970, for the South Vietnamese and the following day for the Americans and ended on June 30. See *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume V, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Documents 219–341.

Kissinger: Oh—

Nixon: And, and, and—well, not public opinion-wise. Laos³ was right, too.

Kissinger: Mr. President—

Nixon: The best thing about Laos that, Bob, you ought to have in mind is, you know, when all these people complain about it and then they vote. We'll never get any credit 'til later. But, if opponents see through [unclear] the casualties and the level of military activity since Laos—no, from Laos, and since—there has been no spring offensive. And that's when they have the offensive.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: Now, something had to happen. What happened? The South Vietnamese went in and kicked the hell out of a lot of North Vietnamese—

Kissinger: No spring offensive, despite the largest input of materiel in any period, including Tet.

Nixon: That's right. Now, one thing else, get the [unclear]—get, get, get that fellow Laird—well, no, no, Moorer. Tell him I want a, a little package for bombing the north.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: And I want it goddamn fast. Now, I don't think we should—I don't think you need to wait for Bill [Rogers]. I think maybe this weekend's a good time. I don't think [unclear]—

Kissinger: Well, unless—

Nixon: —to think why, why does it, why does it have any relationship with the Russians? You think it has some relationship with the Russians—?

Kissinger: Well, I think we shouldn't put it to the Russians [unclear]

Nixon: Well, then, when can you? But we always—there's never a good time. [unclear]—

Kissinger: No, after we've made this announcement. No, no, after—after the 20th. Let's get the [SALT] announcement under the belt. Let's not get that—

Nixon: See, your problem, see, too, with any kind of a summit announcement: once it's out, it's going to tie our hands. You see? When you've got to do anything you're going to do, we want to—we want to be in a position to bang 'em. Look, we've got to bang 'em somehow, Henry. We cannot have them—

³ Nixon refers here to Operation Lam Son 719.

Kissinger: [unclear]—

Nixon: —turn down our prisoner offer, you know, and just kick us around in Paris. We've got to do something.

Kissinger: I agree completely, and I think—But, I just think, Mr. President, to be—having come this close, we can wait five days. After the 20th, a week after—

Nixon: We've been waiting five months.

Kissinger: Oh, no, we've hit them in March.⁴

Nixon: Not much.

Kissinger: Oh, no, that was a pretty good jolt. But, we haven't held up with bombing them. There was this damned Air Force—

Haldeman: And we hit some last weekend. There was a thing that was in the news about the [unclear]—

Kissinger: Yeah, but that was just three airplanes.

Haldeman: Anti-aircraft [unclear].

Nixon: Well, just, just have no illusions. We're not going to go 'til we hear from the North Vietnamese, and we end up banging them. Having that in mind, we play out this string [unclear]—

Kissinger: They—there's something funny going on, though. Le Duan, who was four weeks in Moscow, now, he's in Peking.

Nixon: Oh.

Kissinger: There's something. Something is cooking—

Nixon: You think they're getting ready for a big offensive?

Kissinger: No. No, they—to them, what's going on—to them, there's some—this SALT thing is going to be a jolt, because no matter what the Russians tell them they can't be sure of what side deals are being made.

⁴ A likely reference to Operation Fracture Cross Alpha, March 21–21, a joint Air Force–Navy series of 234 airstrikes and 20 armed reconnaissance sorties against North Vietnamese SAM sites. (Carl Berger, ed., *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, 1961–1973: An Illustrated Account*, p. 92)

202. Memorandum for the Record¹

Washington, May 14, 1971.

SUBJECT

40 Committee Decisions

Due to the illness of the Executive Secretary and the absence of detailed minutes, the following decisions are hereby recorded for the official record:

[Omitted here are the records of decisions for unrelated meetings.]

Meeting: 14 May 1971

PRESENT

Mr. Kissinger, Mr. Johnson, and Mr. Helms
Mr. Richard Davies, Mr. James Schlesinger, Colonel Richard T. Kennedy,
Mr. Cord Meyer, Mr. Fred Valtin, and Mr. Wymberley Coerr were also present.

[Omitted here is discussion of unrelated topics.]

(8) *South Vietnam—Status Report on Worldwide CA Program in Support of SVN and Against the VC*²

Funds in the amount of \$235,000 for FY 1971 and \$228,000 for FY 1972 were approved.

(9) *South Vietnam—Status Report on Covert Media Activities*³

Funds in the amount of \$47,900 for FY 1971 and \$50,000 for FY 1972 were approved.

[Omitted here are the records of decisions on unrelated topics.]

¹ Source: Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, 303/40 Committee Meetings. Secret; Eyes Only. Prepared by Jessup on October 22. Copies were sent to Mitchell, Packard, Johnson, Moorer, and Helms.

² Reference is to a March 18 memorandum for the 40 Committee, which described underwriting visits to South Vietnam by selected journalists and influential personalities, publishing and distributing literature, and replaying news items and feature articles, etc. Bunker had been briefed on the program and Green and Sullivan had given their approval. (Ibid.)

³ Reference is to a May 6 memorandum for the 40 Committee. (Ibid.) On May 17, Kissinger sent Nixon a separate memorandum from Helms, May 6, describing the CIA's special covert action program designed to forestall the second phase of the enemy's spring campaign, which included the following: "GVN police capture of 491 confirmed or suspected VC and killing of 19 others, instituting rigid identity and security checks in densely populated regions of MR 1 and 2; and spread misinformation." (National Security Council, NSC Intelligence Files, Subject Files, Vietnam 14 Jan 1971–22 Dec 1971)

203. Memorandum From K. Wayne Smith of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, May 20, 1971.

SUBJECT

Friday (May 21st) SRG Meeting on Vietnam Assessment

Status of Vietnam Assessment

All the Vietnam assessment studies requested in your April 15 and 28 memoranda have been completed with the exception of the air interdiction study.²

The logical sequence for SRG consideration of these studies would be:

(1) *May 21 SRG: Military Assessment*

—CIA papers on manpower requirements for alternative strategies and Hanoi's capacity to continue to wage war.³

—JCS assessment paper on prospects for 1972.⁴

—OSD Assessment and RVNAF improvements paper.⁵

—ROK alternatives (OSD paper and Saigon cables).⁶

(2) *Political and Economic Assessment (not yet scheduled)*

—SNIE (political and economic prospects)

—economic stabilization paper

—regional cooperation issues

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-56, SRG Meeting, Vietnam Assessment 5-24-71, 1 of 2. Top Secret. Sent for urgent information. All brackets are in the original.

² A list of Kissinger's requested studies is in Document 179.

³ CIA Intelligence Memorandum ER IM 71-84, May 10, "Manpower Considerations and Hanoi's Strategic Options," is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-56, SRG Meeting, Vietnam Assessment 5-24-71, 2 of 2. CIA Intelligence Memorandum ER IM 71-88, May 14, "North Vietnam's Capability To Continue To Wage War," is *ibid.*

⁴ Knowles forwarded the report, "RVN Assessment May 1971," to Kissinger, Johnson, Packard, and Helms under covering memorandum CM-921-71, May 20. (*Ibid.*)

⁵ Laird forwarded a paper entitled "Assessment of the RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program" to Nixon under a May 1 covering memorandum. (*Ibid.*, Box 154, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 9 Apr 71-30 Apr 71)

⁶ Not further identified.

(3) Two other meetings should be scheduled on Cambodia (DOD team report and CIA memorandum) and ceasefire (VSSG paper will be ready by June 6).

You will need to ask DOD to do an air interdiction study.

Meeting Strategy

Goals—You want to come away from this SRG meeting with agreement that:

—(1) We need an integrated short paper encompassing the contributions in the CIA, JCS, and OSD papers. The framework for this summary paper should be an estimate of most, best, and worst probable 1972 situations based on differing assumptions on:

- the enemy threat
- the required main force ratio in MRs 1 and 2 to maintain the main force balance
- the requirement for RVNAF forces in Cambodia.

The analysis should be done for a 100,000 and 50,000 U.S. force level and on the assumption that the two ROK divisions remain in MR 2. The concluding section of the paper should be a discussion of how the gaps and surpluses might be equalized with the currently planned RVNAF force. It should identify net shortfalls for the most, best, and worst probable cases.

—(2) A commitment from DOD to develop *alternative* RVNAF improvement packages for consideration by the SRG. DOD has given you one package consistent only with the best probable estimate. The basis for the other two packages already exists in the NSSM 99 work, a summary of which you have seen in my earlier Vietnam assessment paper.⁷ We need to force OSD to produce a similar paper.

—(3) A commitment from DOD to do the interdiction study. This study should encompass alternative sortie level/mix packages and alternative air/ground interdiction packages. This is a sensitive issue with Laird on which no new DOD analysis has been done since the fall of Sihanoukville and Lam Son 719. Your request for such a study in the April 15th memorandum (tabbed separately)⁸ has gone unanswered.

—(4) A decision in principle to keep at least two ROK divisions in Vietnam through FY 73 and a decision to cable our Saigon and Seoul Missions to that effect and solicit their views on how best to approach the GVN and ROKs.

⁷ See Documents 39 and 102.

⁸ Attached but not printed.

Approach—You should not show your hand at the outset of the meeting. Rather you should review in turn the JCS assessment paper, the CIA memoranda on new manpower estimates and on Hanoi's capacity to wage war. Such a review, with short JCS and CIA briefings will provide a basis for turning to the OSD paper and showing that the calculations therein are based on a "best probable" set of assumptions.

Then you can ask for the best, worst, and most probable analysis, the assessment of what this analysis would imply given the presently planned RVNAF force and 50,000 or 100,000 U.S. forces.

Finally, you will want to remind DOD that they owe us an air interdiction study.

Your talking points are designed to achieve the goals set out above using the strategy I have described. JCS and CIA are prepared to give short briefings on their papers.

Your talking points are tabbed separately.⁹

The balance of this memorandum reviews the papers to be considered

JCS Assessment Paper

The JCS paper is more optimistic than the earlier CIA analysis¹⁰ on the prospects for 1972. However, it is also vague on the key issues and on the basis for its conclusions. Thus there is a basis for closing the gap between its conclusions and those of CIA. The significance of the JCS paper is that:

—the JCS prepared it,

—the JCS paper is well presented and considers a full range of alternatives.

—the JCS paper spells out the military's judgment on how alternative mid-1972 U.S. force levels (150,000; 100,000; and 50,000) will affect the enemy's options.

—the JCS conclusions, while vague, can probably be integrated in a manner consistent with the CIA's estimates of what the enemy can do.

⁹ Attached but not printed.

¹⁰ See footnote 2, Document 192.

The JCS estimate of the probable enemy strategies is shown in the table below.

	1971		1972			
	May Sep	Oct Dec	Jan Feb	Mar Apr	May Sep	Oct Dec
Case I (Prot)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Case II (MR 1)		¹¹	X	X	¹²	X
Case III (MR 2)			X	X	¹⁴	X
Case IV (MRs 1&2)				¹³	¹⁴	¹³
Case V (Camb)				¹³	¹⁴	¹³
Case VI (MR 1/Camb)	-----Not Feasible-----					
Case VII (RVN/Camb)	-----Not Feasible-----					

Major substantive points in the JCS paper are:

—“It is expected that Hanoi will attempt to gain at least one dramatic tactical victory in RVN [e.g., seize Hue or Pleiku] or Cambodia in 1972 to improve NVA morale and diminish GVN and U.S. will to continue.”

—Possible fixes for territorial forces not already in train are not likely to have a major impact on the control situation and thereby the main force balance in 1972.

—The enemy threat section (annex A, p. 14) concludes that “Hanoi will continue its protracted war strategy (Case I) through 1972 with some surges from time to time . . .”

—At a 150,000 mid-72 U.S. force level friendly forces could cope with a major enemy offensive in MR 1, MR 2, Cambodia, or MRs 1 and 2 simultaneously.

—At a 100,000 mid-72 U.S. force level, a permanent redistribution of GVN forces to MR 1 would be required to permit friendly forces to cope with a MR 1, MR 2 or Cambodia offensive. A simultaneous MR 1 and MR 2 offensive would exceed friendly capabilities, but the mil-

¹¹ Logistically feasible, but weather probably will not permit a major offensive in northern MR-1 until late 1971 or early 1972. [Footnote in the original.]

¹² Weather favorable in northern MR 1, but logistic support would be difficult, unless supplies were prestocked, because of rains in Laos. [Footnote in the original.]

¹³ Considered to be at the margin of the enemy’s capability, since execution would depend on the enemy increasing substantially his logistic throughput in spite of weather and the assumed continuation of allied efforts to interdict. [Footnote in the original.]

¹⁴ Although logistic situation might support a major offensive, the weather probably will not permit execution. [Footnote in the original.]

itary losses would not be great (a district town occupied). The enemy would achieve a propaganda victory.

—At a 50,000 U.S. force level, the GVN capacity would be exceeded by an enemy offensive in MR 1, MR 2, or Cambodia or combination attacks in any two of these areas. ARVN would lack the combat support capability to “maintain a significant force in Cambodia.”

Issues—The JCS analysis is thorough and generally very competent. I recommend you read the first 14 pages and Annex B, pages 9–13. The following issues merit discussion:

—Referring to the same table on page 4,¹⁵ what does “at the margin” mean with regard to the MRs 1 and 2 and Cambodia offensives? If the enemy is not constrained by logistics in MRs 1 and 2, why can’t he mount an MR 1 and 2 offensive? On what basis can it be said the enemy has only a marginal capability to mount an offensive in Cambodia if he sets out to do only that?

—Again referring to the table on page 4, what prevents the enemy from attacking in Cambodia and MR 1 simultaneously (Case VI)? Wouldn’t a smart enemy attack in Cambodia in order to keep ARVN from moving forces to MRs 1 and 2? On page 13 it is said the enemy can accomplish more with less in Cambodia than in South Vietnam.

—Is there an inconsistency between the conclusion of Annex A, page 14, that protracted war is the most probable 1972 enemy strategy and the analysis of the friendly situation in Annex B, pp. 9–13? Namely, if our forces drop to 100,000 and ARVN does *not* permanently deploy additional forces to MR 1, won’t the enemy change his strategy? Or if our forces fall to 50,000 and ARVN does what it can, won’t the enemy still have the capability to mount a major offensive. Why won’t he do so?

—The assessment of the implications of a 50,000 U.S. force level (Annex B, p. 13) becomes awfully vague. This point is brought home on pp. 12–13 of the summary when we are told that at none of the force levels will enemy attacks be “militarily decisive” but “they could lead to a deterioration in morale and confidence in RVN and GVN control of its population and territory.” How would the JCS describe what occurred in South Vietnam in 1964–65?

CIA’s Revised Estimates of Manpower Requirements for Alternative Enemy Strategies

CIA has revised its manpower estimates to account for the effect of U.S. redeployments on: (a) force augmentation requirements in the

¹⁵ The reference is to the table printed above.

preparation phase for an offensive and (b) enemy KIA estimates in the execution phase of an offensive.

Strategy	Manpower Requirements (000)				
	Augmentation Req.		Total Infiltration		
	Old	New	Old	New A	New B
Protracted	N/A	N/A	100	70	70
MR 1	20	0	120	85	65
MR 2	16	14	115	80	78
MR 1 and 2	36	14	135	95	83
Cambodia	20	20	150	105	105
MR 1/Cambodia	40	20	180	125	115
RVN/Cambodia	66	28	250–300	175–210	137–172

The new A estimate adjusts the “old” downward by 30% to reflect the reduction in KIA due to U.S. redeployments but does not reflect the lower augmentation estimate. CIA prefers this column because: (a) the enemy will probably plan against some U.S. force above 44,000 and (b) there may be some double counting in adding together the reduced KIA and augmentation estimates.

The new B estimate risks the double counting problem by adding both columns together. It is probably closer to the 1973 estimate whereas new A is the best approximation of 1972 infiltration requirements.

CIA concludes that “the principal effect of the reduced infiltration requirement is to bring all strategies into the range of feasibility during the 1971–72 period, though the general offensive strategy would continue to pose considerable strains on North Vietnam’s military conscription and training organization and result in some draw-down in manpower reserves. The MR 1/Cambodia strategy, which in our original analysis was probably only marginally feasible, would be well within the realm of possibility under the reduced casualties variant.”

North Vietnam’s Capacity for War

CIA has produced an excellent memorandum on North Vietnam’s capacity to wage war. Unfortunately this memorandum is based on the “old” manpower requirements estimates just reviewed and discarded above.

The analysis is nonetheless illuminating. I urge you to read pages 1–8, and pages 25 and 26.

The major points in the memorandum are:

—(1) The table below on estimated inductions by year:

	Thousand men
1965	155
1966	260
1967	185
1968	215
1969	80
1970	200 (preliminary)

Given CIA's estimates that 100,000 inductions per year will sustain a protracted war and that a lead time of more than a year is required for a major mobilization, does the 200,000 estimate for 1970 imply major offensive activity in 1971–72?

—(2) Hanoi would appear to be hard pressed to repeat its 1967–68 performance of two successive years of inductions at the 200,000 rate. The manpower pool has dropped from 1.6 million in 1964 to 800,000 in 1970 (17 years to 35 years). CIA estimates that two years at a 300,000 induction rate would run this pool down to 600,000 in 1971 and 400,000 in 1972. Thus there appears to be a limit to what Hanoi can do. However, this limit is above the 125,000 infiltration requirement for a MR 1/Cambodia strategy that we fear most for 1972. The enemy is more pressed logistically than he is in terms of manpower, if one dares to compare these very different types of constraint. CIA should be asked if this judgment is a fair conclusion based on their analysis. [Such a conclusion would represent a fundamental departure from CIA's long-held view that Hanoi was concerned for manpower rather than logistics. U.S. redeployments and the loss of Sihanoukville may have changed CIA's viewpoint.]

—(3) CIA presents an interesting table comparing North Vietnam's mobilization with South Vietnam's. According to the table (p. 4), in 1970 46% of South Vietnam's 18–39 year old males were in service versus only 21% for Hanoi.

CIA may have neglected to include Hanoi's paramilitary forces although the GVN's RF and PF forces are included. Your talking points raise this issue.

OSD Paper

OSD circulated to the SRG yesterday the same Vietnam assessment Secretary Laird sent to the President. [A DOD messenger retrieved one page late yesterday and provided a substitute that blanked out the fixed date/POW proposal.]

In addition OSD circulated a JCS paper on modifications in the RVNAF which in Nutter's words "is in accordance with the [OSD] as-

essment." In actual fact the JCS paper proposes only minor fixes for FY 72 and their impact would not in the judgment of DOD's own analysts, close the gap described in OSD's assessment.

OSD Assessment

The crux of OSD's assessment lies in the assumption behind the table reproduced below (from p. 3 of the OSD paper).

	Ratio of RVNAF Main Force Bn Strength to VC/NVA		RVNAF Surplus/Deficit	
	Projected	Desired	Troops	Bns
MR I	0.6	1.1	-26,500	-44
MR II	2.8	2.5	+ 4,700	+ 8
MR III	3.0	2.5	+ 6,500	+11
MR IV	3.7	2.5	+10,100	+17
Reserve			<u>+ 9,100</u>	<u>+12</u>
RVN Total			+ 3,900	+ 4

The points I make below have been fully checked with the OSD/SA analyst (Lt. Col. Eddins) who put the table together. He has worked closely with us in the MR studies. Unfortunately ISA has filtered his analysis to Laird and ISA does not understand it fully.

The analysis is based on the following assumptions:

—The most probable threat to South Vietnam in 1972 is an MR 1 offensive. This is what is termed by Laird "CIA's estimate which we consider maximizes both the size and supportability of possible VC/NVA offensive operations."

—50,000 U.S. forces in South Vietnam at mid-72.

—ROK's remain in MR 2 until FY 73.

—A "desired" main force ratio (MFR) of 1.1 for MR 1 and 2.5 for MR 2 would maintain the main force balance in these areas with the risk of only slight control losses.

—There is no requirement for the permanent stationing of RVNAF forces in Cambodia or for operations against South Laos of long duration, i.e. ARVN forces would be withdrawn from Cambodia.

These assumptions are reasonable. In combination they represent a best probable outcome. Most and worst probable outcomes need to be estimated as well.

But even accepting OSD's best probable assumptions, the RVNAF improvements called for by the analysis far exceed what in OSD's view are required. For example, there is a 44 battalion deficit in MR 1 that

can only be filled in part with ARVN's present 31 battalions of mobile forces (marines, paratroopers, and the 9th Division). Thus another division must be added in MR 1.

Other assumptions would considerably magnify the task of restructuring RVNAF to meet the 1972 threat. I state below the key assumptions in the best, worst, and most probable variants.

Threat	Best (Laird) MR 1 Offensive	Most Probable MR 1 and 2	Worst MR 1 Cambodia
Desired MFR			
MR 1	1.1	1.5	2.0
MR 2	2.5	3.0	3.0
Main force requirements for Laos and Cambodia	0 bns	10 bns	15 bns

All cases would assume the ROKs remain in MR 2 and the U.S. force level is 50,000 in mid-1972.

In your talking points you ask the SRG to examine best, worst, and most probable cases.

Points you make to convince them that this is necessary are:

—The OSD analysis assumes there will be no requirement for RVNAF forces in Cambodia or Laos in 1972. Ask OSD if this assumption is consistent with the findings of the DOD team.

—Whereas the OSD analysis assumes a MR 1 offensive in 1972, the CIA and JCS/DIA analysis of the threat make it probable that the enemy can exceed an MR 1 offensive. *More likely is a MR 1 and 2 offensive.* Worst probable but within Hanoi's capability is an MR 1/Cambodia offensive.

—The MFR's used in the analysis for MRs 1 and 2 are below what to date have been considered necessary to maintain the main force balance, even with a substantial U.S. force component included. In the most probable case these ratios should be increased from 1.1 to 1.5 for MR 1 and from 2.5 to 3.0 for MR 2. You can illustrate this by asking OSD if it believes the GVN will be able to take 8 battalions (almost a division) from MR 2 in 1972 as the analysis indicates. GVN control in MR 2 has fallen from 54.6% to 52% since December and in the northern part of the MR it has dropped about 10%.

If these modifications are made in OSD's analysis, all within the best, worst and most probable framework, the countryside RVNAF 4 battalion surplus will vanish and the fixes required will become of a greater and more realistic magnitude.

JCS RVNAF Fixes Forwarded by OSD—The OSD paper includes as Tab B a list of JCS proposed improvements for RVNAF.

These are minor and focus on the combat support and logistics capabilities of RVNAF that must be expanded in 1972 because of the accelerated rate of U.S. redeployments.

—The current FY 72 goal of a 1,092,087 man RVNAF is accelerated to 1,100,000 or the FY 73 goal. This represents a 7,913 increase.

—ARVN grows by 3,219. One air defense artillery weapons battalion and three station hospitals are added. An additional armored cavalry squadron is added in MR 2, 10 M-106 mortar platoons are added to division armored cavalry squadrons, 10 military police companies are added, and 17 RF battalion headquarters and 219 PF platoons are added.

—The Vietnamese Navy grows by 1,070. The Coastal Surveillance Radar System is activated and 29 river patrol boats are added.

—VNAF grows by 1,539. No new VNAF units are created. The logistics and maintenance forces are strengthened.

ROK Forces

There are two issues. The *timing* of ROK withdrawals and deployment within SVN. The ROKs have indicated an intention to begin withdrawal of one division equivalent after the SVN presidential elections. The GVN wants *all* ROKs to stay until CY 73 because they believe earlier withdrawals would expose the critical coastal areas of MR 2 where the ROKs operate.

The interagency paper produced 4 sets of options which are reduced to table form in your book for ready reference. MACV favors option 4 which would involve withdrawing ROKs in parallel with U.S. forces, with the last combat ROKs leaving in December 1972. This option is the most convenient in terms of phasing out present U.S. logistics for the ROKFV. It does not take into account GVN desires or the possible political and military desirability of continued ROK combat presence in 1972 and into CY 73.

The Washington Agencies take no explicit position on the options although they believe that there should be *no increase* in support costs for the ROKs and that present funding arrangements should continue to January 1, 1973, with follow-on arrangements to be examined at a later time. (This position effectively precludes redeployment of ROKs within SVN.)

In the cable traffic Ambassador Bunker originally favored the MACV option for ROK withdrawal in phase with our redeployments. In a subsequent message to the President, however, he appears to have shifted to the GVN point of view.

The other issue is *deployment* of ROK forces within Vietnam. The GVN, MACV and JCS favor continued utilization of ROKs in MR 2 without redeployments to MR 1. The rationale is twofold: (1) the need for main forces in critical MR 2 coastal areas and (2) the quid pro quo

of 80–100 million in equipment likely to be demanded by the ROKs for shifting forces to MR 1.

Your purpose at the meeting should be to ensure that we do not foreclose the possibility of continued ROK combat presence if that is what the GVN and ROK agree upon and also to keep open the possibility that at some point ROK redeployment to MR 1 may be desirable depending on the situation there. You may also want to point out that the MACV position is based on an assumption that the enemy continues his protracted war strategy. We can all agree that no one would advocate continued ROK combat presence if it were only to meet a protracted war threat.

204. Minutes of a Meeting of the Senior Review Group¹

Washington, May 24, 1971, 3:09–4:27 p.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam Military Assessment

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Dr. Henry A. Kissinger	OMB
State	Mr. James Schlesinger
Mr. U. Alexis Johnson	NSC Staff
Mr. Charles Whitehouse	Mr. K. Wayne Smith
Mr. Rodger Digilio	Mr. Robert Sansom
Defense	Mr. John D. Negroponte
Mr. David Packard	Mr. W.R. Smyser
Mr. Armistead Selden	Mr. Morris F. Edmundson
Maj. Gen. Fred Karhos	Mr. Keith Guthrie
Lt. Gen. Donald V. Bennett	Mr. Mark Wandler
Mr. George C. Fowler	
CIA	
Mr. Richard Helms	
Mr. Paul Walsh	
Mr. George Carver	
JCS	
Gen. William C. Westmoreland	
Brig. Gen. Adrian St. John	

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-112, SRG Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Nodis. The meeting was held in the Situation Room of the White House. All brackets are in the original.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. *Outlook for 1971–72.* It was the consensus of the SRG that there were no manpower constraints on the enemy's choice of strategies in 1971–72 and that the JCS evaluation of the order of probability of various enemy strategies was correct.

2. *Further Study Requirements.* The assessment of the military situation in 1971–72 is to be completed in time to have the issues presented to the President for decision no later than mid-June. For this purpose, the following papers are to be completed by June 4:

a. *Summary Situation Estimate.* Based on the analysis contained in the studies submitted by CIA, JCS, and OSD,² the VSSG Working Group will prepare a summary estimate setting forth the best, most, and worst probable situations and outlining the implications of each, particularly as regards U.S. and allied force levels, requirements for U.S. air and logistical support, and RVNAF capabilities. In connection with this estimate, two models for the reduction of U.S. forces should be provided covering (1) a program that would permit a smooth logistical phase-down and (2) a program that would maximize friendly capability to deal with the worst probable case.

b. *ARVN Force Improvements.* The VSSG Working Group will also develop alternative RVNAF force improvement programs applicable to the best, most, and worst probable cases set forth in the summary situation estimate referred to in sub-paragraph a.

c. *Air Interdiction Study.* As confirmed by Mr. Packard at the SRG meeting, the Defense Department will provide a study of air interdiction options as requested in Dr. Kissinger's memoranda of April 15 and 28.

d. *Ground Interdiction Plan.* Defense will provide a plan for possible ground interdiction operations in Laos.

e. *Options on ROK Forces.* Based on the analysis completed under the auspices of the Vietnam Ad Hoc Group, an options paper will be prepared for the President setting forth the basic alternatives for employment of Korean forces in Vietnam: (1) phase-out along with U.S. forces, (2) maintaining ROK forces through 1972, with phase-out in 1973, and (3) establishment of a mobile task force, with possible phase-out of ROK forces not required for the task force.

Dr. Kissinger: I thought we should bring to focus our strategic assessments, lest we end up by having the most brilliant study ever made after the Vietnam war is ended. Perhaps we could begin with a short briefing by the JCS on their assessment.

² See Document 203.

Gen. St. John: What I plan to do is give you a quick overview of our assessment. Our objective was to develop friendly capabilities and to focus on the probable outcomes in accordance with the requirements you set forth at the April 27 SRG meeting.³ Annex A deals with enemy capabilities, and Annex B with friendly capabilities. These annexes are followed by a summary which gives the issues and our conclusions.⁴

Let me review the basic assumptions: (1) U.S. redeployment will continue in accordance with the President's latest directive, which specifies that troop levels will be down to 184,000 by December 1, 1971.⁵ (2) We have considered that with 150,000 troops in mid-1972, U.S. forces would decline thereafter to a MAAG-level by June 30, 1973, that with 100,000 troops in mid-1972 they would decline thereafter to a MAAG level by December 31, 1972, and that with 50,000 troops in mid-1972 they would remain thereafter at that level, which is essentially that of a MAAG.

Mr. Johnson: Does the 50,000 include personnel sufficient to continue air sorties at the present level?

Mr. Packard: That's 50,000 in-country.

Gen. St. John: We would continue the air sorties at the present level. There would be at least 1,000 B-52 and 10,000 tactical air sorties per month in CY 72. Of course, some support is provided by units stationed outside Vietnam, for example, in Thailand.

Dr. Kissinger: I thought we were talking about FY 72.

Gen. St. John: We received a correction from your staff changing FY to CY. We followed that directive.

Dr. Kissinger: My staff? Who did it? May I find out?

Gen. St. John: We received a copy of a message from the Staff Secretary saying that it should be changed to CY.

Mr. Smith: I got a copy the same as everyone else.

Dr. Kissinger: I never heard of it.

Gen. St. John: To continue with the assumptions, we also postulated that one ROK division would be withdrawn by June 30, 1972. We concluded that manpower does not place any limits on the enemy's options. The major constraint on the enemy is the amount of throughput he can deliver to combat areas.

Mr. Schlesinger: You say the enemy is facing no quantitative limitation, but is the quality of enemy manpower holding up?

Gen. St. John: Yes, it is.

³ See Document 192.

⁴ The summary and Annexes A and B are attached but not printed.

⁵ See Document 174.

Dr. Kissinger: Just to make clear on sortie rates, I want to point out that the issue is between FY 73 and CY 72.⁶

Gen. St. John: As I was saying, one ROK division would be pulled out during the period we are discussing.

As for enemy capability, manpower would not be a limiting factor in the case of a major offensive. We define a major offensive as the equivalent of having 9–15 battalions in contact with the enemy for 5–10 days.

Dr. Kissinger: Do you mean that after 5–10 days they would have to quit?

Gen. St. John: Yes, but this can be expressed in different ways—45 to 150 battalion days of operation, not 10 days per se. It's also possible to have 2–3 divisions in operation for 30 days, with each battalion in contact for one day out of six.

Dr. Kissinger: How would you have described the Tet offensive in these terms? What would have been the Tet figure in battalion days?

Gen. Bennett: Tet was a little below this level.

Gen. St. John: I believe they had more battalions [for Tet].

Gen. Westmoreland: (to Gen. Bennett) I would question what you just said, Don.

Gen. Bennett: I'll have to go back through the data and look it up.

Mr. Packard: It depends on how you average it out. For example, you can have more battalions concentrated in a shorter number of days.

Gen. St. John: You have to realize that there are certain imponderables which may affect enemy logistical capabilities as well as the probable likelihood that the enemy would undertake certain strategies. For example, he might decide to sustain major losses in an MR 1 offensive in order to discredit the GVN and the Vietnamization program. As another illustration of what I mean, it is also possible that he would continue military activity at present levels. The idea would be to hold off until U.S. forces go down to a minimum level and to build up stock piles.

Throughout we have based our assessment on certain general considerations concerning friendly capabilities. We have assumed that normal use would be made of the GVN reserve and that they would be moved if necessary to reinforce threatened areas. We have also assumed that there would be some permanent redeployment of GVN forces either to deal with the protracted warfare situation or to improve control in any MR where this might be needed. For instance, there might be some permanent redeployment in MR 1 or MR 2. We also consid-

⁶ Subsequent to the meeting it was confirmed that the time period applicable to air sortie rates is CY 72. [Footnote in the original.]

ered that the ROK forces might be moved either permanently or temporarily. This is not a major factor, and we have another paper which addresses this question. However, we generally concluded that the quid pro quo that would probably be required would make this an unreasonable course of action. We also took into account cross-border operations, that is, air and ground interdiction of enemy logistical activities in Cambodia and Laos.

Dr. Kissinger: But aren't you assuming there won't be substantial South Vietnamese forces in Cambodia and Laos next year?

Gen. St. John: We feel there should be substantial South Vietnamese forces in Cambodia and Laos next year.

Dr. Kissinger: But that isn't OSD's view.

Mr. Smith: As our force levels decline, so does our support for big South Vietnamese operations such as Lamson. The ARVN has no capacity to launch operations like that.

Gen. St. John: We have assumed that U.S. support would be available.

To return to the considerations regarding friendly forces that I was speaking about before, there could be some acceleration of the RVNAF improvement and modernization program. The OSD paper also covers this. I believe our analysis is consistent with what OSD said. There are certain non-military factors that could offset these considerations: adverse election results, weakening of South Vietnamese will to continue, economic or other factors and the withdrawal of U.S. support. We have set forth our conclusions regarding the enemy's capabilities in the form of a chart which parallels that which was presented by CIA at the last SRG meeting.⁷ We believe that the enemy can continue protracted warfare throughout the period under discussion. Our definition of protracted warfare includes surges and high points, possibly one in Cambodia that would be sufficient to create a crisis there. In terms of logistical capabilities, the enemy could mount a MR 1 offensive by October 1971. However, we believe he would probably delay until late 1971 or early 1972 because of weather conditions. I believe this is generally in agreement with CIA's estimate.

Dr. Kissinger: Is your analysis affected in any way by the fact that the enemy is apparently keeping supplies moving through the rainy season?

Gen. Bennett: The study was based on the assumption that they were not closing down the supply system during the rainy season.

⁷ See Document 192 and footnote 2 thereto.

Gen. St. John: Our estimate for an offensive in MR 2 is similar to that in MR 1. The enemy has the capability to mount such an offensive by January 72. We believe that the enemy capability to launch offensives simultaneously in MR 1 and MR 2 or in Cambodia is marginal. By this we mean that such offensives would be possible only at the highpoint of his capabilities. He would have to have considerable success in getting his supplies into the combat areas. For example, he would have to have good luck and good weather conditions.

We have concluded that the enemy does not enjoy the capability to mount simultaneous offensives in MR 1 and Cambodia or in the whole of Vietnam and Cambodia.

Dr. Kissinger: If I get back to Harvard by the spring of 72, I have a fighting chance of making it—and letting Alex take the responsibility.

Gen. St. John: To conclude, we believe that by using their reserves (and we believe that we will need to begin visualizing some redistribution of RVN forces), the Vietnamese can hack it through CY 72. We consider the most likely enemy strategy will be protracted warfare with surges and high points in selected areas. MR 1 is the high-threat area. We are also concerned about Cambodia. Because of the FANK's lack of capability, the enemy could cause a serious military crisis in this area. This would be especially serious if a crisis were combined with an ARVN withdrawal or some political difficulties. We don't necessarily foresee it, but we are concerned.

Mr. Johnson: Would an ARVN offensive in southern Laos alter the likelihood of the enemy's being able to provoke a crisis in Cambodia?

Gen. St. John: It would not at this time change our assessment. Depending on what we do, particularly as regards air interdiction, as we approach CY 73, the enemy's capability to undertake some of these strategies may shift from marginal to feasible.

Dr. Kissinger: When you say a strategy is feasible, does that mean it will succeed?

Gen. St. John: No. It means the enemy has the capability of launching an operation of that size. Then we look to see what we can do, to see if we have enough to meet such an operation. We have concluded that for this CY we can meet an offensive in MR 1.

Mr. Packard: This means they can handle the military situation. It gives no assessment of what effect enemy action will have on the pacification effort.

Dr. Kissinger: But this is the easiest enemy strategy.

Mr. Packard: Yes. (to Gen. St. John) You haven't made an assessment of the impact of protracted warfare.

Gen. St. John: Yes, we have. There would be some disruption, but it would not cause the fall of the ARVN.

Mr. Packard: Not enough to cause a change in the rate of withdrawal.

Mr. Johnson: How does the U.S. redeployment rate change the estimate?

Gen. St. John: It doesn't make a tremendous amount of difference. As you get to the lower residual force levels, you necessarily have a lot of your men tied up in support activities, for example, logistical retrograde.

Dr. Kissinger: You mean the last people pulled out will be the processing clerks?

Mr. Packard: We have to salvage something.

Gen. St. John: In planning the withdrawal, there is a real problem in balancing the advisory, security and processing personnel.

Dr. Kissinger: Everyone agrees, then, that there is no manpower constraint on the enemy's choice of strategies. Isn't that right?

As I understand it, there is no logistical constraint on an offensive in MR 1. If that is true, then what keeps them from launching simultaneous offensives in MR 1 and 2?

Gen. Bennett: There are logistical restraints in MR 1 until the end of the rainy season. But in order to continue the present level of activities, they would have to move in more reinforcements and supplies. This is not a logical course of action.

Dr. Kissinger: I'm not challenging this. I just want to understand your analysis. You say they can't mount an offensive in MR 1 until December and that they can't mount an offensive in MR 2 until February, but that they can't do both simultaneously until May. Why is this so?

Mr. Packard: That's a marginal strategy.

Gen. Bennett: They need additional supplies in both areas.

Dr. Kissinger: You mean that 9–15 battalions will be operating in each MR?

Gen. Bennett: Yes.

Gen. St. John: We might as well lay on the table one difference between CIA and us. We are less optimistic about enemy logistical capability than CIA. We take the view that he has less logistical capability than CIA estimates.

Dr. Kissinger: It's so unusual in this room that I see you disagree. What does CIA think?

Mr. Walsh: We give them more logistical capability. We think the DIA analysis is very restrained with regard to enemy capabilities.

Dr. Kissinger: What figures would you put on it?

Mr. Walsh: In Cases 1 and 2, our estimates are in line with DIA's. In the other cases we give them the capability to launch an offensive 2–3 months earlier than DIA. In Case 6, we give the enemy the capability at the end of the dry season, and DIA gives him none. We agree in Case 7.

Dr. Kissinger: Why do you all put Cambodia so late?

Gen. St. John: Because of the throughput requirement and the distance the supplies have to be moved.

Dr. Kissinger: How much do they need in order to take on the FANK?

Gen. St. John: We assumed that ARVN remains in Cambodia.

Mr. Walsh: We put Cambodia in the middle of the dry season. You ought to remember that they had large stockpiles in Cambodia. Cambodia is an anomaly. We believe the model doesn't work perfectly because of uncertainties about the stockpiles down there. We think the date for achieving an offensive capability should be earlier.

Gen. Bennett: We differ with CIA on the size of the stockpiles, on the residual supplies from Sihanoukville and on the amount they can get through to Cambodia.

Dr. Kissinger: Let me raise one important question about probable outcomes. As I understand it, we will be short 44 battalions at the low level of U.S. troop withdrawals. That is about 26,500 troops.

Mr. Smith: That's in the OSD table.

Dr. Kissinger: Everyone ought to agree on the facts. I don't believe OSD has any independent means of determining them.

Gen. St. John: We all agree, give or take a battalion or so, with regard to the basic force ratios. But the arithmetic doesn't take into account the quality of the troops—such things as leadership and training.

Dr. Kissinger: I don't care about the exact numbers. You say that the most probable strategy is protracted warfare. If they have the force levels you cite, why is it that the most likely strategy is an MR 1 offensive?

Gen. St. John: Because we have the capability to move the general reserve into the region.

Mr. Packard: That judgment is more than a purely military evaluation. From a strictly military standpoint, it is easier for them to concentrate everything in MR 1; and MR 2 would be an easier target than MR 1. When we say an offensive in MR 1 is not probable, we are basing our conclusion on other than military factors.

Dr. Kissinger: If they carry out any of these other strategies, would they be doing so at the cost of reducing the intensity of protracted warfare? As I understand, they don't have to choose between Case 1 [protracted warfare] and the others.

Gen. St. John: That's right.

Dr. Kissinger: Why do you believe that the most probable strategy is Case 1 as opposed to some of the others?

Gen. St. John: They would probably want to husband their resources. If they shoot their wad earlier, they would perhaps suffer later because of our own capabilities.

Dr. Kissinger: You have pointed out that our capabilities are not great at that [the projected residual U.S. force] level.

Gen. St. John: When we talk about capabilities, we are talking about all friendly forces. This includes ARVN. Our estimate, of course, doesn't preclude periodic high points.

Dr. Kissinger: But they wouldn't be shooting their wad with an MR 1 offensive or even a combined MR 1/MR 2 offensive.

Mr. Walsh: I think that's right.

Gen. Bennett: They have the capability from the standpoint of logistics and personnel to carry out Case 1 [protracted warfare] starting in the October–December 1971 period. They could initiate a high level of activity in MR 1 or MR 2 right after January 1972. Furthermore, they have the capability to carry out protracted war along with one of the other strategies.

Dr. Kissinger: Can they do this without sacrificing their offensive capability in 1973?

Gen. Bennett: Yes, sir.

Gen. Westmoreland: It would water down their 1973 capability somewhat.

Dr. Kissinger: Then the basic decision for the enemy is between protracted war, which we know we can handle, and taking on the additional logistical burden necessary to support one of the other strategies. If they made the extra effort, they could possibly hurt South Vietnamese morale and have a significant effect on our elections. Protracted warfare is the case least likely to affect U.S. opinion; whereas, some splash of enemy military activity would be the thing most likely to have an impact. They might want to try to influence U.S. opinion before 1973.

Gen. St. John: We put protracted warfare first [as probable enemy course of action] but we don't put an offensive in MR 1 far behind. I realize that may sound like we are weaseling.

Dr. Kissinger: I don't want to go through every paper. Are there any significant disagreements with the JCS paper? I know that OSD feels that the ARVN forces won't be in Cambodia next year.

Gen. Karhos and Mr. Packard: I don't think that is so.

Dr. Kissinger: Is there any disagreement with the JCS analysis?

Mr. Packard: There are two things I should mention. We think that the estimate of enemy capabilities may be a little conservative. As for the necessity to maintain air sortie levels, we prefer to look at this question in terms of capabilities rather than fixed levels.

Dr. Kissinger: What do you mean by capabilities?

Mr. Packard: Let me show you a picture. (Shows Dr. Kissinger a photograph of an area bombed by B-52s.) This shows a block in the Laotian Panhandle before and after being bombed by B-52s. It looks

as though the bombing was not very effective. We ought to concentrate on effectiveness as regards our air effort.

Dr. Kissinger: We asked for an air interdiction study, which we have never gotten. In the absence of a study, there is a natural interest in hanging on to what we have.

If we can step up our bombing efficiency, I have no disposition to oppose such steps. Can we get the air interdiction study?

Mr. Packard: We are looking at various ways to improve our capabilities. We have done what we can to provide the South Vietnamese an air capability.

Dr. Kissinger: Does anyone disagree with this [the JCS] analysis?

Mr. Johnson: I have no reason to question it.

Gen. Westmoreland: I think that it has some weaknesses. It is quite obvious that MR 1 is the problem area, but I don't think the answer is to move the general reserve up there. This would be costly and time-consuming. We do indeed have to be prepared for enemy surges, but what is needed is more troops permanently on the ground. Time is of the essence if we are to do something along this line. We have to do it while the U.S. troops are there. We expected to set up something before now, but nothing was done. The answer is to send in cadres by taking the fourth battalions from the three divisions in MR 3 and the three in MR 4.

Mr. Johnson: Do you have the manpower there [in MR 1]?

Gen. Westmoreland: Some is there, and some will probably have to be recruited. There are a lot of RF and PF troops that can be recruited. More troops can be supported in MR 1.

Mr. Johnson: How much help is it to trade RF and PF units for ARVN units?

Gen. Westmoreland: We need both. It might be necessary to lower the minimum age to 15, but that has been done before. It is absolutely essential to have more strength on the ground.

A second comment I have is that there is a tendency to write off the ROK forces. On pacification, we can anticipate some fraying around the edges, but this will not necessarily be disastrous. We need to look at logistical support for additional forces in the North. That is something that has to be addressed and planned for. I am not sure sufficient attention has been given to it.

Dr. Kissinger: I take it no one assumes there will be an attack across the DMZ.

Gen. Westmoreland: (to Gen. Bennett) You don't rule that out, do you?

Gen. Bennett: No, we don't.

Mr. Packard: What you are thinking about [as regards increasing South Vietnamese forces in the North] is making trade-offs with forces in the South.

Gen. Westmoreland: Yes. I don't think that South Vietnam can support an army larger than 1,100,000.

Mr. Johnson: At a U.S. force level of 50,000, would the fixed-wing and chopper capability be available to support the ARVN forces? If this support is reduced, are we not overestimating ARVN capabilities?

Mr. Packard: You are going to have substantially less chopper support.

Gen. St. John: We calculated through CY 72 and deemed the airlift that would be available adequate. 1973 is another matter. There will be decreases in airlift and even less chopper support.

Mr. Johnson: What about choppers for troop lift?

Gen. Karhos: The ARVN has about 500. Our force is considerably larger.

Gen. Westmoreland: They are going to have to use more trucks and APCs.

Mr. Packard: We have about 5,000 helicopters.

Mr. Johnson: And they will be left with 500?

Dr. Kissinger: When will this be?

Gen. Karhos: I have that figure. Next year, the South Vietnamese will have 864 helicopters. If you take out 364 on the basis of attrition and floats, that leaves 500.

Dr. Kissinger: As against 5,000 now. In that case, how do we get the strategic reserve to I Corps?

Gen. Karhos: There are other aircraft available.

Gen. Westmoreland: For now, U.S. airlift is available, including C-141s. Later they will be able to use their own air force, which has C-123s and C-119s.

Gen. St. John: The table on Page B-7 [of the JCS paper] explains the situation.

Dr. Kissinger: Can we see what the helicopter, tactical air, and close air capabilities will be at the 50,000 [residual U.S. force] level?

Gen. St. John: Based on current plans, it would be as indicated in Table B-7.

Mr. Packard: We would still have about 50 C-130s. That would be adequate.

Mr. Johnson: As far as choppers are concerned, we are actually going to reduce South Vietnamese capabilities.

Dr. Kissinger: Why are we so determined to reduce choppers?

Gen. Westmoreland: Gen. Abrams has held back as many as he thought he could afford.

Mr. Packard: This table is not complete. The total number of some types of aircraft is still undetermined until we decide what we think our force structure will be.

Gen. Karhos: I think the helicopters would be among the last things to be taken out.

Dr. Kissinger: Another table [Table 3 to Tab D to Annex B] in your paper shows that helicopters will be dropping fairly quickly. They will go from a total of 50 [U.S. and VNAF] squadrons to 17, if U.S. forces are cut to the 50,000 level; and at that level only one of the squadrons will be American. The table also shows a decline in U.S. squadrons from 36 to 31 to 25 at the next two increments [force levels of 184,000 and 150,000] in troop withdrawals. For the succeeding increment [150,000 to 100,000] U.S. helicopter squadrons will drop from 25 to 12. I would rather sacrifice a few cataloguers and lose some equipment.

Gen. Westmoreland: There has been some correspondence with MACV on this.

Gen. St. John: We're just trying to balance off our competing requirements.

Dr. Kissinger: The President's objective is to hold the situation together and not to have the most beautiful logistical plan of which history informs us.

Gen. St. John: We have instructions to get at least \$21 billion worth of equipment out of the country.

Dr. Kissinger: Whose instructions are those? If the situation comes unstuck, we will lose a lot more than equipment.

Gen. Westmoreland: I sent a message to MACV on this a couple of months ago. Maybe we should review the matter again.

Dr. Kissinger: Assuming there is no further discussion on the basic assessment, I think what we need is an analysis of the worst case and the probable case. It is the worst case that is going to kill us. Of course, it should be a realistic worst case, and not a nightmare situation. We should have two models for reduction of U.S. forces. One should provide for a smooth logistical phasedown. The other should be designed to enable us to be in the best position to meet the worst case. The price we would pay if there is a collapse would be out of all proportion to any supply losses that may occur.

We have to get this wrapped up by the end of the next week. We don't want this to be a RAND type of study that never gets used. (to Mr. Smith) Could you have your working group pull together all of these studies and do an analysis of the worst and probable cases? We need to present this in a form so that the President can make a decision. The study should tell the President; "If you want to get down to a U.S. force level of 50,000, this is the way to do it. If you want to minimize the risk [of a collapse in Vietnam], this is the course of action to follow."

(to Mr. Packard) You were at the meeting where the President said that he wanted to keep the helicopters there.⁸

Mr. Packard: I think we can work out various ways to get down to a level of 50,000.

Dr. Kissinger: Let's get this done by next week in the form of choices for the President. Otherwise it will be too late.

Gen. Westmoreland: I would like to make the point that we need the air sorties. The picture that Dave Packard showed you may give a false impression. Normally we don't use B-52s in this role. They aren't good for saturation bombing of roads, but we have to hit such targets as truck parks.

Mr. Packard: That is what you say you do, but that is not what the pictures show. I am not against B-52s. But if people see we are using them this way, they will send us to the closest nuthouse. Let's use them for the right kind of targets.

Mr. Schlesinger: (to Gen. Westmoreland) You mentioned that the Vietnamese can't go above a level of 1.1 million for their armed forces. In your judgement, if the economic resources could be found, could the Vietnamese forces be expanded?

Gen. Westmoreland: I am not a student of the Vietnamese economic situation. I used to be, but I have been away from it for a long time. I believe that there is an economic restraint [on the size of the armed forces], but in my opinion they have exceeded their manpower capabilities.

Mr. Schlesinger: If we could find another \$100 million for security assistance, would that affect your judgment?

Gen. Westmoreland: I was talking about a trade-off involving about 15,000 men.

Mr. Packard: I think the number could be higher. We have a problem about whether we can get the resources to support them, and also whether they can support themselves. This all adds up to taking a look at improving capabilities.

Dr. Kissinger: We also need to consider alternative ways of meeting the various shortfalls. To rely on the strategic reserve while cutting mobility is dangerous.

(to Mr. Packard) Are we getting that air interdiction study?

Mr. Packard: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: Our previous studies showed that the various outcomes were extremely sensitive to threats against the supply lines in Laos. We asked for plans to maintain a threat against the supply lines

⁸ See Document 169.

and thereby tie down enemy forces. Again, if I understand correctly, the sensitivity of the whole logistical scheme to a Lam Son type operation is enormous.

Gen. St. John: That's right.

Dr. Kissinger: But we didn't receive a plan for interdiction operations in Laos. Can we get that from whoever prepares such things?

I understand that there is a group just back from Cambodia, and that their report shows that we have one year to fix the situation in Cambodia. What is the status of all of this?

Mr. Smith: The team is back, and they have submitted their report to Secretary Laird.

Dr. Kissinger: When will we see it?

Gen. Karhos: It is due to you by June 1.

Dr. Kissinger: Okay. We will take a look at it when it gets here.⁹ This gets us to the question of the ROK forces.

Incidentally, I am assuming that we will have alternative RVNAF improvement packages to go with these [worst and probable cases].

Mr. Schlesinger: Let me mention that we have \$100 million in the AID budget which we can't squeeze into Vietnam. Thus, there are funds available there for development of additional forces.

Gen. Karhos: AID just told us we couldn't have \$16 million for the Vietnamese police.

Dr. Kissinger: It is lucky you can't get a C-5A for that price.

Mr. Helms: By all means let's help out the police.

Gen. Westmoreland: Beefing up the police would help offset the battalions deactivated in MRs 3 and 4.

Dr. Kissinger: I have every confidence in the ability of this group to spend \$100 million.

With regard to the ROK forces, we have two issues: their deployment in Vietnam and the timing of their redeployment from Vietnam. Given the manpower problem, I believe we shouldn't stress getting these forces out of Vietnam even if they don't fight well. (to Gen. Westmoreland) What do you think?

Gen. Westmoreland: I am afraid the time has passed for moving them to the DMZ area. I think we ought to go to the ROKs and say that we want an elite, mobile task force of about 8,000–12,000 men to operate along the coast in MR 2 and that we will give them modern equipment. The force could be used in the highlands. It would be understood that when needed, they would move.

⁹ See Document 212.

Dr. Kissinger: Would you ship back all the rest of the Koreans?

Gen. Westmoreland: The [the remaining Korean] capability would be even less than now.

Mr. Johnson: This is a completely new alternative.

Dr. Kissinger: As I understand it, the force ratios in MR 2 are already precarious. How is it possible to remove the ROKs?

Gen. Westmoreland: I think it would be best to have the force there.

Dr. Kissinger: Why does MACV want them out? For elegance of redeployment planning? That is a G-4's way of looking at things.

Gen. Westmoreland: Once our forces are out, the Koreans can't be supported in the manner to which they are accustomed.

Mr. Packard: The point is that they are not very effective and it would be best to redeploy them as we go.

Dr. Kissinger: The point is that they are doing something. Why live so dangerously? We are going down to 50,000, and we pull out the Koreans. How many ROKs are there?

Gen. Bennett: 45,000 to 47,000.

Dr. Kissinger: Where in God's name are the South Vietnamese going to get the forces to replace them? Isn't it doubly effective to keep them in MR 2?

Mr. Packard: They are not effective where they are.

Dr. Kissinger: They are covering two provinces.

Mr. Johnson: Thieu is anxious that they remain. Why—whether for political or military reasons—I don't know.

Gen. Westmoreland: I don't know why we should be in a hurry to move them. The alternative is the course of action I mentioned.

Dr. Kissinger: That is your second choice?

Gen. Westmoreland: My first choice would be to do both—that is, maintain the full strength of the Korean force and also create a mobile force.

Dr. Kissinger: How much more [than just having a mobile force] would that cost?

Gen. Westmoreland: It would cost. But it is too late to do that.

Mr. Johnson: Why?

Gen. Westmoreland: It is too late politically. We can't sell such a proposal without paying a high price.

Mr. Johnson: We haven't tested the waters yet. I think there is a connection between U.S. forces in Korea and maintaining Korean forces in Vietnam. If we reach a decision to keep the Koreans (and I am sympathetic to that), I think we will have to agree to maintaining U.S. forces in Korea through 1973.

Dr. Kissinger: If an enemy offensive has an adverse psychological impact on the South Vietnamese, and if this is all combined with a simultaneous withdrawal of all outside forces, the results could be catastrophic. We ought to get a paper for the President so that he can make a choice. We should pose the three alternatives: (1) moving the Koreans out along with our forces, (2) keeping the Koreans through 1972 and phasing them out in 1973 (this is what the GVN and Bunker endorse), and (3) Westy's [Gen. Westmoreland's] alternative of a phase-out plus constitution of a special task force.

Mr. Johnson: Part of the problem is the uncertainty about the cost of the better alternatives. We need a decision that we can broach this with the Koreans. The cost figures we have are astronomical.

Mr. Whitehouse: I wonder about moving one division to I Corps. Bill Sullivan believes that might be useful. The minimum cost solution might be to have one division in I Corps and one in II Corps.

Mr. Johnson: What does the military think?

Gen. Westmoreland: I have always believed that would be desirable. Gen. Abrams' assessment of it has been affected by political and economic factors. He says we can't afford it.

Dr. Kissinger: One price we can't afford is to have the whole situation unravel next year.

Mr. Packard: The Koreans are not controlling much now.

Dr. Kissinger: If we pull the Koreans out and everything goes to pieces, it will turn out that they have controlled something. It is not a case of keeping them there for five years. One more year is what we are talking about.

Gen. Westmoreland: They contribute a certain amount of control by sitting on Highway 1.

What we are talking about, then, is maintaining the Korean forces for one year.

Mr. Schlesinger: And possibly moving some of them to I Corps.

Dr. Kissinger: That would be a nice refinement.

Mr. Packard: Maybe we ought to get an assessment of this.

Mr. Johnson: We are perfectly willing to test the water on moving one division to MR 1.

Mr. Selden: That would make it more difficult to remove our forces from Korea.

Mr. Johnson: If we approach them on this and they accept, we can't move any troops from Korea in 1973.

Mr. Packard: It would be logical to move them to MR 1.

Mr. NegroponTE: The GVN's official rationale for wanting to keep the Koreans is to meet the threat in the coastal region of MR 2.

Dr. Kissinger: There is one thing we need to prepare for. If the war continues next year, the other side is going to make a hell of an effort. One incentive for them to keep going through 1972 is the hope of bringing off a repeat of 1968. Pulling our troops out of Korea in 1972 could be less important than having the Koreans in Vietnam.

Mr. Packard: We ought to go back to Gen. Abrams and ask him to assess their utility, leaving aside political and economic factors. Then Alex [Johnson] can take some soundings.

Dr. Kissinger: As long as we don't take the Koreans' refusal to move as an excuse to get their troops out of Vietnam.

Mr. Johnson: We haven't had any conversations on this with the Koreans. We have no basis for judging what their reaction would be.

Dr. Kissinger: We should try to get all these issues moved to the President by next week.

Mr. Whitehouse: With regard to the best and worst probable cases, I take it that an MR 1 offensive is considered to be the worst.

Dr. Kissinger: We don't know. We have to see the results of our analysis.

Mr. Whitehouse: I see. It is wide open.

Mr. Packard: Why do these matters all have to be settled by mid-June?

Dr. Kissinger: We don't want to turn this into an esoteric exercise, where others let us analyze while they make the decisions. I know that strategy.

Mr. Packard: We never do anything like that.

Some instructions will be needed on this.

Dr. Kissinger: Like what? On bombing levels?

Mr. Packard: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: As long as we have the capability, we can always cut down.

205. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, May 25, 1971, 8:30 p.m.

K: Mr. President.

P: How are you?

K: Okay. I hope you had some good weather down there.²

P: It was pretty hot.

K: Actually nothing much has happened. The casualties this last week were 34 and they didn't include the 31.

P: Did not.

K: No.

P: Why not?

K: Because they hadn't notified the next of kin yet and they won't release these until the next of kin has been notified.

P: Oh, I see.

K: We can spread them over the next few weeks.

P: Yeah.

K: Only 5 this week, not a bad week.

P: There were 34 without any of the 31. It is good to have 34 this week. I am planning a conference on Friday³ and I don't want to come up with too high figures.

K: Are you planning to have it in the evening?

P: Oh, yes.

K: I have heard some conflicting—

P: Oh, it has to be at night.

K: I got some word you were reconsidering.

P: No, nobody talked to me about that.

K: Mr. President, one thing I wanted to mention to you is the meeting with Thieu.⁴ I have had research done on how many times the end of combat has been announced. Laird only announced it 15 times and Rogers announced it about 7 times.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 10, Chronological File. No classification marking. All omissions are in the original.

² Key Biscayne, Florida.

³ May 28. The President had his news conference on June 1; see *Public Papers: Nixon, 1971*, pp. 688–697.

⁴ Reference is to an upcoming meeting scheduled for June 15 on Midway.

P: Doesn't mean much.

K: My grave concern is the minute you announce—With Vietnam now on the back pages of the newspapers, the minute you announce a meeting with Thieu you will have—

P: Think you can get out of it, not to announce to go out and—

K: By the middle of June, we will know whether the Vietnamese will accept. If they accept, they will make the announcement. If it isn't—

P: You mean go out and make it a joint _____.

K: For the whole package.

P: Leaving out that line?

K: No, deadline and everything and let them refuse it publicly. If you see Thieu, you will have to see Thieu to keep it from blowing up, or we will be in the Mansfield position we were in a couple of weeks ago.

P: I know. Don't think your announcing now means enough?

K: I saw Bill today, he thinks the same thing.

P: He would rather wait?

K: Yes.

P: Can say we are weighing that. In view of that, we will just wait and see. He doesn't know about the other meeting?

K: No. By the middle of June, we will know. _____ will have signed the accidental war agreement, will have had the Chinese reply and will then know what the cards look like.

P: On Thieu—

K: We have to see him this month.

P: _____

K: Between the 20th and 30th and it would be a lot more effective. Even if we make a troop announcement then it will be closer to when the combat announcement _____. I am sending you a memo which has the whole record of what has been said.

P: I don't know what more we can say. Don't know if—

K: If we announced the end of combat and make the offer of withdrawal, we know it will get turned down.

P: Withdrawal of a certain time next year.

K: The way you got Thieu to agree to Midway.

P: Let me say I haven't got a fix on it but with the debates coming up we are going to have heavy shelling from Congressional people about the drafting business and all the rest—but you don't think this is enough?

K: I am just afraid it isn't enough.

P: We may have to go. If it isn't enough, there is no reason to do it.

K: _____ and Haig quite independently came to the same view.

P: Well, it seems to me—

K: The average American may not have heard all these things Laird and Rogers have said.

P: The average American—you know, have you checked the polls? They don't even believe we are going to get out, we can't repeat it too often.

K: By the end of the month—by June 25th, you will see your cards much more clearly.

P: Yeah.

[Omitted here is conversation unrelated to Vietnam.]

P: Alright. On the Thieu thing. I must say I have mixed emotions. I am inclined to think it would mean more than you think on the combat thing.

K: As soon as you announce it, Harriman⁵ will be on every national broadcast _____ and we will have nothing to top him with.

P: If you could come _____ when you went to see Thieu you had this plus an offer. It is awfully hard for those who have been talking deadlines to talk ceasefire. How in the hell can you talk about deadlines without talking about ceasefire?

K: I saw Sainteny today—he was in town—and he said just to do it for the prisoners is too little.

P: Yeah.

K: He mentioned exactly the package we have developed although I didn't bring it up. If they refuse it, we can make it publicly.

P: Why don't you have him go back, he would be good cover. Can he be back in Paris?

K: He will be in Paris tonight. He left already.

P: You can say you went over to see an old friend.

K: I will hold off talking to Thieu.

P: No, no; if he has to know—

K: [I can hold off on talking to him.]⁶

P: I have no strong feeling about the damn thing. Let me put it this way. Bill Rogers feels we should not have it _____ .

K: Exactly.

P: He realizes we have to have a meeting.

K: We promised it.

⁵ W. Averell Harriman.

⁶ Brackets are in the original.

P: Promised it?

K: When Bunker was here last time.

P: Bill has no objections to meeting, just doesn't want to have it now.

K: No.

P: Did he suggest a peace time we can open?

K: _____

P: Don't open this to Laird—don't tell him a damn thing! When does he go to Europe?

K: Next Tuesday.⁷

P: Well, under the circumstances defer the Thieu thing to the last part of June. Get the message off.

K: Right.

P: I can see the problem. June 20th.

K: I will check a date with Haldeman tomorrow morning but I think we should have an alternate date available.

P: Yeah.

K: I will check the date and send a message.

P: That's all right, do it. Take a crack at it. Anything else new—
[Omitted here is conversation unrelated to Vietnam.]

P: Except in Vietnam. Really the problem—our enemies and press, people like Resor⁸ keep hacking away. We are carrying a burden then we have to make a sale nobody will buy.

K: People will buy it.

P: Except in Vietnam. The polls are pretty rough and they have some effect on the jackasses that read them. Well, we will hope for the best. Go right ahead with the Thieu thing and get it out of the way. I don't mind putting it off.

K: Right, Mr. President.

⁷ June 1.

⁸ Stanley R. Resor, Secretary of the Army.

206. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, May 28, 1971.

SUBJECT

My May 31 Meeting with the North Vietnamese

As you know, I am scheduled to meet with Xuan Thuy again Monday morning, May 31, in Paris.² I plan to use this meeting for two basic purposes:

First, I will clarify the recent ambiguous statements by the other side in the Paris plenary sessions concerning withdrawals and the release of prisoners.³ Ambassador Bruce has already asked about these issues, but I think it is important that the record show that we have followed up vigorously (and privately) all possible leads.⁴

Secondly, I will lay out our package proposal which includes our readiness to set a terminal date for the withdrawal of all our forces from South Vietnam as part of an overall settlement; an Indochina ceasefire-in-place; no infiltration of outside forces into the countries of Indochina; international supervision of the ceasefire and its provisions; respect for the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Accords; and the release of all prisoners of war.⁵

This package in effect separates the political and military issues. Our presenting it accomplishes three objectives:

—First, by moving toward their position of a fixed date for our withdrawals, it should clearly establish if they have any interest at all in negotiations or if they will continue to insist upon the overthrow of the Saigon Government. We should get their preliminary response to the proposals at the first meeting, but a definitive reply may await a second session.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 853, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David Vol. VII. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for action.

² A tape recording of Nixon and Kissinger's discussion of the upcoming meeting is *ibid.*, White Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 507-4.

³ At the April 29 meeting in Paris, the NLF offered to negotiate local cease-fires and Xuan Thuy issued a statement indicating that the DRV was willing to discuss a date for U.S. withdrawal and POW release and was prepared to hold private meetings to discuss these issues. (*The New York Times*, May 13, 1971, p. 44)

⁴ Nixon highlighted this paragraph and wrote the following: "Spend no more than 2 or 3 minutes on this. It is only for the record and the record probably will only come out in history books. Let Bruce do this. Record [undecipherable word] publicly."

⁵ Nixon highlighted this paragraph and wrote the following in the margin: "Go directly and briefly to this major point first."

—Second, I believe the package, with such provisions as ceasefire, no infiltration,⁶ international supervision, and POW release, holds many attractions for us. If we could negotiate something along these lines I think we and the South Vietnamese would be in a good position.

—Third, if the other side remains intransigent, we will have laid out a forthcoming position and further improved our negotiating record. We could, at a time of our choosing, make our proposals publicly and strengthen our position both here at home and around the world.

Attached for your Approval at Tab A⁷ is a draft statement that I propose to make. In addition to questioning their recent public statements and making our proposals, it emphasizes that time for negotiations with meaningful U.S. participation has just about run out. I would make clear that these proposals represent the last chance for a negotiated settlement. In response to questions, I would, of course, reaffirm that we will never agree to their demand that we replace the Saigon Government leaders.

Ambassador Bunker has informed Thieu of our meeting.⁸ He told Thieu that we will follow up the other side's recent ambiguous public statements in Paris and discuss the relationship between ceasefire, POWs, and the U.S. withdrawals. He reaffirmed that we will not agree to the other side's political demands and stressed again the need for absolute secrecy about this channel.

Thieu made no objections and thought it a good idea to probe the other side's views again. Hopefully, we will have some feel for the other side's attitude so that you can discuss negotiations with Thieu in some detail at Midway.

Recommendation:

That you approve the draft statement at Tab A, including the new negotiating proposals.⁹

⁶ Nixon circled "no infiltration" and wrote "negotiable" above it.

⁷ Attached but not printed at Tab A is the Opening Statement. Nixon wrote at the top of the first page, "Make the first two much brief[er] and to the point." A revised draft dated May 29, of roughly two pages including greetings, salutations, and the administration's view of the context of the meeting, is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 853, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. VII. It has a handwritten note at top indicating that Kissinger took it to the May 31 meeting.

⁸ See Document 184.

⁹ Nixon wrote, "OK," on the approval line and underneath wrote, "With modifications as suggested." Deleted from the opening statement was the following: "We understood from your Soviet friends that you were ready once again to hold discussions here," a reference to Kissinger's March 25 meeting with Dobrynin (see Document 165). In addition, during their May 24 meeting, Dobrynin told Kissinger that he was certain North Vietnam would release prisoners if the United States gave a specific deadline and he offered to check with them on this point. Kissinger said he would let him know if the administration was interested. The memorandum of conversation is in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIII, Soviet Union, October 1970–October 1971, Document 229.

207. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Paris, May 31, 1971, 10 a.m.–1:30 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Xuan Thuy, Chief of North Vietnamese Delegation
Vo Van Sung, North Vietnamese Delegate General in Paris
Phan Hien of North Vietnamese Delegation
North Vietnamese Interpreter
One other North Vietnamese Official

Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Major General Vernon Walters, Defense Attaché
W. Richard Smyser, NSC Staff
Winston Lord, NSC Staff

Kissinger: It is a great pleasure to see the Minister again.

Xuan Thuy: For me too.

Kissinger: How is Mr. Le Duc Tho?

Xuan Thuy: He is now in Hanoi. He has not come to Paris again since your last meeting. I told him that Mr. Special Adviser wanted to meet with us. Since he is engaged, he asked me when I meet with you to give you his greetings. He said he hoped he would see Mr. Special Adviser again.

Kissinger: Please give him my warm regards. I want to remind you and him of my invitation to you to visit me in the U.S. when all this is over.

Xuan Thuy: No doubt, when the war is ended, mutual visits will be easier. I hope Mr. Special Adviser will come to our country. I don't know if you have visited Saigon. I hope you will also come to Hanoi.

Kissinger: I have been in Saigon. I hope to visit Hanoi. As I have often told the Minister, I have the greatest respect for the courage and dignity of the Vietnamese people, and for the intelligence of Messrs. Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy. I only object to their tenacity.

Xuan Thuy: You are tenacious. Not we. We want an early end to the war. You prolong the withdrawal of troops. We want a prompt withdrawal of troops. You don't.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1039, Files for the President, Vietnam Negotiations, C.D., HAK II 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting took place at the North Vietnamese Residence in Paris, 11 Rue Darthe. Haig forwarded an edited version to Bunker under a June 9 covering memorandum. (Ibid., Box 853, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David Vol. VII) According to his Record of Schedule, Kissinger left his office in Washington at 11:05 a.m., May 31, and returned at 8:15 a.m., June 1. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellaneous, 1968–76)

Kissinger: Before the end of our discussions, the Minister must let me win at least one argument before my self-confidence is destroyed.

Xuan Thuy: I think you win all the time.

Kissinger: That fact is hidden from me.

A technical point. These meetings are known only to the President and Ambassador Bruce on our side. No one else on the American side. The fact of my visits here is known only to the President of France, not to the Foreign Ministry or anyone else.

We are sometimes asked by some of your allies, when you inform them of these meetings. I want you to know we never respond or make known the substance of our conversations.

Xuan Thuy: I understand that we shall maintain the modalities as before.

Kissinger: Exactly.

Xuan Thuy: Sometimes people on your side ask ours questions. Only a few days ago the press and our acquaintances have asked us that they have heard rumors of secret talks between us on the question of POW's. I answered them that our position on POW's is quite clear. No discussion is necessary.

Therefore I understand Mr. Special Adviser's position is that your side will not divulge anything in connection with these meetings. We will do the same.

Kissinger: We won't even divulge the fact of the meeting. We do not tell the French what goes on. We have to tell the French that I am here in order to get the plane in. But we do not tell them the contents. We tell them nothing.

Xuan Thuy: I think that if the Presidency knows, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does too.

Kissinger: I doubt it.

Xuan Thuy: I am prepared now to listen.

Kissinger: I have a rather brief statement.

Last time we met the Minister closed the meeting by saying, "Each time we meet, the meeting is ended with a smile." However, it is also true that in our previous talks we have made no real progress toward bringing peace to Vietnam.

I am here in order to bring concrete progress as well as smiles, because if there are to be real negotiations to end the war, these negotiations must be now.

We know each other's basic views very well. There is no reason to waste time on general philosophy, on exhortations, on rhetoric or on an analysis of how we see the situation within Vietnam or Indochina.

President Nixon has conducted a personal review of the negotiations. He has carefully looked at your positions and we have looked at our own. The President has sent me here to make one last effort to break the deadlock.

Here is our final proposal for a settlement. There will be no other in this Administration.²

First, we are prepared to set a terminal date for the withdrawal of all our forces from South Vietnam. We would, as I have indicated earlier, arrange for roughly the same timetable for the withdrawal of other Allied forces.

Second, the Vietnamese and the other peoples of Indochina should discuss among themselves the manner in which all other outside forces would withdraw from the countries of Indochina.

Third, there should be a ceasefire in place throughout Indochina, to become effective at the time when U.S. withdrawals based on the final agreed timetable begin.

Fourth, as part of the ceasefire, there should be no further infiltration of outside forces into the countries of Indochina.

Fifth, there should be international supervision of the ceasefire and its provisions.

Sixth, both sides should renew their pledge to respect the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Accords, to respect the neutrality, territorial integrity, and independence of Laos and Cambodia. This could be formalized at an international conference.

Seventh, I want to reiterate our proposal for the immediate release of all prisoners of war and innocent civilians held by both sides throughout Indochina. We believe this issue should be settled immediately on a humanitarian basis. If this is not done, the men must be released as an integral part of the settlement we are proposing in our final offer. We would expect:

—Your side would present a complete list of all prisoners held throughout Indochina on the day an agreement is reached.

—The release of the prisoners would begin on the same day as our withdrawals under the agreed timetable.

² When Kissinger informed Dobrynin during a June 8 meeting that the administration had made its final offer to the DRV, Kissinger stated that Dobrynin was surprised that there had been a meeting, a point that he believed was significant since Dobrynin had always known about the existence of the meetings in the past. (Memorandum of conversation, June 8; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 491, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1971, Vol. 6 [Part 2]) The full text of the memorandum of conversation is in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIII, Soviet Union, October 1970–October 1971, Document 252.

—The release of prisoners would be completed at least two months before the completion of our final withdrawals.

We are prepared to talk concretely and to make rapid progress. We have framed this offer to respond to your proposals. We expect that you will deal with our final proposals in a constructive spirit.

My presence at these meetings has two implications. I would not be here unless the President were prepared to move rapidly toward a negotiated solution.

Second, there is no sense in these sessions if they are used only for us to tell you what we will do while you will not tell us what you will do. Negotiations must be a two-way street.

Let me emphasize to you that our meeting today is crucial. If you look back over our six previous meetings, you can make many criticisms but you cannot accuse me of having ever misled you.

Since 1968 we have done everything that your side and other countries have told us would lead to genuine negotiations.

Today we have taken a final step toward you. Now, if ever, is the time for us to reach an honorable settlement.

It is for you to decide, of course, whether further battle will bring you additional gains and if such gains would be worth the additional suffering and losses that will surely come. You must judge whether prolonged fighting against those who pose no long-term threat to you might face you with more real dangers later on and jeopardize your long-term future.

We have clearly made our choice. If necessary we are determined to persist. But we strongly prefer a negotiated settlement.

Therefore we propose to start today to end the war and move toward peace. Let both sides refrain from military pressures as we go forward rapidly with negotiations. We propose to you one last time to work rapidly for a peace that will redeem the sacrifices that both sides have made and that will launch the process of reconciliation.

Thank you Mr. Minister.

Xuan Thuy: (To his interpreter.) May I have these seven points repeated?

Mr. Special Adviser, may I ask you a few questions for clarification?

Kissinger: The Minister would not disappoint me by failing to do that.

Xuan Thuy: The first point is that in your seven point proposal you only mention your disposition to set a time limit for the withdrawal of U.S. and allied forces. You have not yet set a definite date for these withdrawals.

Do you mean by that that this date should be discussed or that such date will be set at some time later?

The second point I would like to raise is that, in our previous sessions, you and we both said that military questions and political questions should be discussed at the same time. Now in your proposal, I have noticed, you have only spoken of military questions, and leave aside the political questions.

May I pose these two questions? If further questions arise, I will pose them later.

Kissinger: With respect to your first question. We will set a date when we know that the basic proposition is acceptable to you. Then, when the date is set, we will discuss the details of all the other points.

With respect to the second question, we believe that the proposal we have made reflects the reality of the current situation.

When U.S. forces are finally withdrawn, the political future of South Vietnam will have to be left to the Vietnamese.

Xuan Thuy: I would like to put a question regarding your second point. I feel that you have now reversed the order of these discussions.

Kissinger: Reversed what order?

Xuan Thuy: At the first stage, you said that the U.S. and the Vietnamese would discuss only military questions. As to political questions, they would be settled by the Vietnamese themselves. Then, at the second stage, we have come to the agreement that military questions and political questions should be discussed at the same time.

But now, at what you say is the final stage, you have separated these questions again and returned to the first stage of our discussions.

That will not settle the problem, because whatever you say the Saigon Administration is one created, set up by the U.S.

Kissinger: Is that a question or a statement?

Xuan Thuy: I am not now stating any views on your proposal. These questions are put to see whether I have well understood your proposal.

Kissinger: We have heard from your side for a year that setting a date would lead to constructive negotiations to end the war. We have told you that we cannot do both. Since we have told you that, once we set a date, what happens after that is not our responsibility.

Therefore we are now accepting your proposal that we set a date. What happens later will have to depend on the political evolution in Vietnam.

Xuan Thuy: I understand now.

It does not mean that you have accepted our proposal. It is that you want to return to your previous position.

Kissinger: It means that we are accepting your proposal to set a date, which you have told us would lead to a settlement of the conflict. It is what I told you when we met in September.³

Xuan Thuy: Let me put further questions.

Please, Mr. Special Adviser, what do you mean by saying that the question of POW's should be an integral part of an overall settlement, and on the other hand that the release should be completed two months before troop withdrawals are completed?

Kissinger: I mean that as part of the final offer that I have made, there must be agreement that prisoners will be released. The release of prisoners must be made side by side with withdrawals. The last POW must be released two months before the last American is withdrawn.

Xuan Thuy: I would like to ask the meaning of the last POW's being released two months before the last American is withdrawn. The POW's are a consequence of the war. You are a philosopher. How does philosophy explain that?

Kissinger: Let me make two points:

First, of course, we would release any prisoners which we and our allies hold on the same schedule.

Second, at that point, the number of our forces remaining in Vietnam will be so small that the direction will be self-evident.

Third, if the Minister and I can solve all the other issues, I believe we will not let philosophy block a final settlement.

Xuan Thuy: The philosophy is yours to explain. There must be a reason for everything.

When you give lessons to students in the university, you should give logic, reasons for doing this.

Why the troops making aggression want to be withdrawn very slowly and very late, and the aggressors captured released first?

Kissinger: They'll be released at the same time except for a small group. But I don't think we should waste time on this. It is not an important point.

Xuan Thuy: May I propose now a little break, so that I can review. If I feel something is unclear, I would pose further questions.

Kissinger: The Minister is difficult enough when he has no time to think. I'm not sure I'm serving my own interest.

Xuan Thuy: You have proposed many times that we have a break. Now I do so.

³ See Document 34.

Kissinger: I need it.

(There was a break of about 45 minutes. For 35 minutes Thuy conferred with his colleagues while his interpreter asked for a copy of the English version of the seven points. They were read to him and he made a verbatim record. During the 10 minute tea and snack break, Mr. Kissinger stated that the U.S. was not a long-term enemy of North Vietnam.)

Xuan Thuy: First of all, I would like to thank Mr. Special Adviser for having presented the seven-point proposal given to you by President Nixon.

You said that this proposal is the final one under the present Administration. There will be no other.

On this point I have no comment to make, because this is up to the Nixon Administration. We have our own point of view.

Now, regarding these seven points, we have just had time to look very perfunctorily at them. Therefore my comments now are based on this perfunctory review of the seven points. What I will say is only preliminary remarks. It does not mean that we have accepted the proposal, or that we do not accept it.

Particularly, there is a point we deem necessary to elaborate our point of view on, so that there may be no misunderstanding on your part.

You have long known that we support the PRG 10⁴ and 8 point⁵ proposals. I do not repeat our position. But, through the realities of the situation, since we met the last time in September, we have come to summarizing in three points confirming to the real situation in Vietnam. Since we have not met for a long time . . .

I raised these three points at the 109th session at Kleber Street⁶ and later. I repeatedly raised these three points again.

The first point is whether the U.S. accepts the time limit of June 30, 1971 for withdrawal of U.S. and Allied forces. If not, it should propose another reasonable date for this withdrawal for the consideration of the parties. Naturally, such a deadline should be aimed at rapid withdrawal of U.S. forces; it is not for prolonged withdrawal.

The second point is that the U.S. should accept the reasonable and logical proposal of the PRG concerning the formation of an administration in Saigon without Thieu-Ky-Khiem, standing for peace, neutrality,

⁴ See footnote 2, Document 35.

⁵ See Documents 41 and 43.

⁶ Reference is to the 109th plenary session held on April 15.

independence, and democracy, and such administration will engage in serious negotiations with the PRG.

The third point is that the U.S. should respect its engagements on complete and unconditional cessation of bombing and acts of war against the DRV, as well as on encroachment on the security of the DRV.

After the 109th session, I kept repeating these three points and I gave more precision, saying that the first point regarding a date for withdrawal is imperative, and should be settled immediately before we go further.

So far the U.S. has not mentioned any definite date for troop withdrawals.

If now the U.S. sets a date, then this will pave the way for a settlement of all other questions rapidly and easily, including the question of the captured military personnel.

I recall these three points to show that the first point is not separate from the other points, to show that military questions should not be separated from political questions.

However, in the seven points you have just presented, I have two remarks to make:

The first point worth noting is that in your presentation you said the U.S. was disposed to set a date for troop withdrawal, but you did not say a definite date, what day, what month, what year. Such a definite date would pave the way for a settlement of all other questions.

So your representation is not quite conforming to what we have been stating.

Kissinger: That, of course, is not my total ambition in life.

Xuan Thuy: Because you said you accepted our proposal, I said you have not.

My second remark is that in our previous private meetings you and I agreed that both military questions and political questions should be discussed at the same time. And now you separate these two kinds of questions.

As I understand, it is always your view that the question of the South Vietnamese Administration should be settled by the South Vietnamese themselves. Theoretically, it is so. But practically, it is known to everyone that the U.S. has set up and backed up the present Administration so far. You kept saying to us that this Administration was formed through elections, and that it has its own political structure.

This affirmation is for diplomatic and propaganda fields, but when we come to a settlement, we should go to the root, to the nature, of the problem. Therefore, if now you return to your original position, saying that you will maintain the present Administration in South Viet-

nam, and you refuse to discuss the political problems at the same time, then one of the basic problems will not be settled.

Now I would like to speak about the public opinion in South Vietnam. They are talking a great deal about the coming elections.

You have been telling us for some time that you do not want a change in South Vietnam in an official way. Therefore, I would suggest that you should think about the coming election. That is some opportunity, which does not imply unnatural change in South Vietnam. It is an opportunity for you to prove your desire to settle the problems of Vietnam, both military questions and political questions.

Third, you have spoken about the question of prisoners. In my questions, I have to some extent made clear my point of view. You said that we should not waste our time in discussing this question here.

Kissinger: I meant the two-month difference. I said we should not waste time on that point.

Xuan Thuy: So I'll refrain from discussing this question now.

But I should point out that you have launched many campaigns with respect to the question of POW's. You are stepping up such campaigns now. In our view, we think such campaigns may deceive a number of Americans in that they are aimed at deceiving a number of Americans to cover up your real intentions. But as far as the Vietnamese are concerned, the people who are fighting for their independence, these campaigns have no effect at all.

It is our real desire to settle the problem. If a settlement is to be reached, we should go straight to the gist of the problem, and should not use such problems as these for propaganda.

Fourth, you have mentioned Laos and Cambodia. You have mentioned withdrawal from Indochina. We have repeatedly made clear our view on that. We have been stating many times that we respect the sovereignty, neutrality, and territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Cambodia and the Kingdom of Laos. We have been respecting the Geneva Agreements of 1954 and 1962.

For the time being, there are contacts and meetings between the representatives of Prince Souphanouvong and Prince Souvanna. It is our earnest desire to see the Laotians come to a peaceful settlement of their own problems.

Fifth, you said you would not be here if President Nixon had not wanted a rapid settlement of the conflict. It is our assessment, too. We know that Mr. Special Adviser is an important personality in the U.S. Administration. You have to cross the ocean many times to come here. It is evident that the purpose is important. Your position is important. Your work is important.

It is the same for our own government. It is also the earnest desire of our own government to see the problem of Vietnam settled on the basis of respect for the independence and sovereignty of Vietnam.

That is why I myself, as a Minister, and Mr. Le Duc Tho, one of the leaders of our own party, have been sent here. We have come here as people who have the confidence and trust of our government and party and with competence and authority to settle the problem. If it had not been so, then our government would have sent here some other Ambassador, and I would not be here. I have been here for over two years. Since May, 1968.

But the question is how to settle the problem. You said that we should consider whether further military operations should continue, since the U.S. will continue also. And we should consider whether the long-term future of the DRV would be jeopardized.

I have many times told you that the objective for our nation and the Vietnamese people is genuine peace and genuine independence. It is natural that we should follow the path of negotiations to reach genuine peace and independence. But on the contrary if you purposely or deliberately apply your policy of aggression against our country there is no other way left for us but to continue our struggle. This has been proven by history. We are not making aggression against anyone. We are not doing any harm whatsoever to the U.S. In comparison to the U.S. we are a far smaller country. Our might and power are not as great as that of the U.S. There is no reason why we would seek problems with the U.S.

What we want is that neither the U.S. nor any other country make aggression against our country and should leave us alone. The Vietnamese people would be able to engage in the peaceful construction of Vietnam. They would establish peaceful relations with all countries, including the U.S.

It is our hope the day will come when you will invite me and Le Duc Tho to visit the U.S. I hope also the day will come when we could invite you to Hanoi.

We are not afraid of a policy of violence, but we would very much prefer negotiations.

Now I will not relate all the developments since we met last time in September. I will only relate here the developments since October.

Kissinger: You're telling me that you are just skipping one month.

Xuan Thuy: You kept extending the war to Cambodia. You launched a total victory campaign against Cambodia. It has failed. No settlement has been reached in Cambodia.

Kissinger: May I interrupt the Minister. We will get nowhere if we keep repeating history. I didn't repeat history.

Xuan Thuy: No, I would like to speak on which way is better, the policy of violence or the policy of negotiations.

You launched Lam Son 719 into Laos. As a result the U.S. and puppet troops failed. You intended to cut Laos into two parts. Your tactics, your strategy have failed too. You are making a great deal of propaganda about the successful policy of Vietnamization, that as a result of the success of Vietnamization the Saigon Administration can stand alone. But I should say that before the application of the Vietnamization policy this Saigon Administration was there. It was there not because of the success of Vietnamization but because of the presence of U.S. forces.

Now for troop withdrawal. You would withdraw by the air or by the sea. You could withdraw by the airways you control; you have enough. The seaways are under your control because of your great number of ships. You should have withdrawn all forces rapidly, but you are unwilling to do that. Does that mean that conditions are not ripe for withdrawals, or that you do not have the means for withdrawals? Now many American persons, politicians, military people, affirm that it would take only fifteen days to withdraw U.S. forces.

Kissinger: That's total nonsense. Besides we have an agreement in these meetings that the Minister will not comment on the U.S. domestic situation.

Xuan Thuy: Because you thought we have to follow your intentions and because your own people, Americans, make assessments of the situation in Vietnam, therefore I have to quote them. If they make statements on the Middle East—

Kissinger: The Minister and I have an understanding. We'll take care of our public opinion and you of yours.

Xuan Thuy: We have made such an understanding, but since your public opinion speaks on the situation, therefore we must give an interpretation.

Kissinger: All right, but I won't listen to it at these meetings.

Xuan Thuy: So now I say that it is our earnest desire to have serious negotiations. I suppose you too have an earnest desire for serious negotiations. Therefore I have analyzed which is the better way, the policy of violence or of negotiations. We are reluctant to follow the policy of violence. If you follow the policy of violence, I don't think you will obtain the results you think. Therefore it is better to have serious negotiations.

Such are our preliminary remarks after hearing your opening statement and seven points and concluding paragraphs. But it is natural that to comprehensively understand these proposals they will need further study.

Kissinger: Naturally.

Xuan Thuy: So the only suggestion I have is that: of these seven points, are there any points that we should pay particular attention to? If so, let me know.

Secondly, is there any point we have not clearly understood and on which you want to give a fuller explanation?

Kissinger: Let me ask some questions. The Minister pointed out that if a date was set this could pave the way for solution of other problems rapidly and easily. Is that correct?

Xuan Thuy: Right.

Kissinger: Am I to understand that the DRV is prepared to release prisoners if we set a date?

Xuan Thuy: First I should say that I have pointed out three points at the 109th session at Kleber Street and subsequent sessions. I stress, lay emphasis on the first point.

Secondly, the date you would set should be a reasonable one for rapid withdrawal of U.S. forces. It should not be a date just for a date's sake, or very far away.

Kissinger: I understand.

Xuan Thuy: And if such a date is set then it would open the way for a settlement of all other questions including the question of captured military personnel.

Kissinger: I have heard this. But what I want to know is what does "open the way" mean? Will the prisoners be released if we set a date?

Xuan Thuy: I said already that if a date is set then all other questions will be settled, including captured personnel.

Kissinger: Can I put down "yes" in my notes?

Xuan Thuy: All other questions, including the question of captured military men, will be settled. You have not set a date, you have not given a specific date, and you can not expect a specific answer.

Kissinger: I don't want a specific answer. You can make the answer conditional. If a date is fixed, mutually agreed, will the prisoners be released? Or will the Minister begin to speak of prisoners? We have too much experience on that.

Xuan Thuy: We have a precedent with the French in the past. After the signing of the Geneva Agreement all French prisoners of war were released immediately.

So on this question now we have shown more flexibility. We have said that once the date is set after that discussions will begin on the question of release. When we say discussions on release that means coming to release. You have apprehensions about discussions but there will be no discussion without setting a date. And there can be no settlement without discussion.

Kissinger: I had an experience with Mr. Sung's predecessor, Mai Van Bo, in 1967. We were told that if we stopped the bombing there would be constructive negotiations. Four years later we have stopped the bombing and this hasn't led to constructive negotiations.

I tell you categorically that we will not set a date without assurance that this will lead to the release of prisoners of war. We would not set a date. This is not subject to negotiations. We will not set a date in exchange for discussions.

Let me now be concrete about our proposal. We must be realistic. The Minister is skillful enough to keep this discussion going for the next six years if he wants to. You have told me that if we set a date it would lead rapidly and easily to solution of all other problems. This is the purpose of our final offer. If you tell us that the basic offer is acceptable, i.e., that all other points I have mentioned, including the release of prisoners, are agreed, I will then give you a date. You will of course have your own idea about that date. Once we agree the other measures will be worked out in complete detail. And we believe that with good will on both sides this can be done rapidly.

Now let me say a realistic word about political questions. I am of course familiar with the three points that the Minister made at the 109th session. But we are talking now about reality. I told the Minister at our first meeting nearly two years ago⁷ that the longer the war goes on the more difficult it is for the U.S. to influence the situation in Saigon. If the war goes on another two years it will be more difficult still. This is why we say that this is our last opportunity for you and us to have a serious negotiation.

The Minister has pointed out that there will be elections in South Vietnam this year. Of course I will not presume to lecture the Minister about the political situation in Vietnam. I want to make two assertions to the Minister. First, the U.S. will not interfere in the political process of the elections. Secondly, if you and we could settle military issues during the summer then the people of South Vietnam could make their decisions with full knowledge of what the military situation will be over the years ahead. They will then know the degree of American military presence which they will have in the future and can therefore make their decisions accordingly. This is another reason why we should settle the issues rapidly.

We will listen if you have another political proposal, a political proposal other than the one you have made. But we believe the realistic situation is best described as I have done, and therefore our final

⁷ The two first met in August 1969; see *Foreign Relations; 1969–1976*, volume VI, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Documents 105 and 106.

offer has an indirect impact on the political situation as well. That is for you to decide.

I want to remind the Minister one more time of what I have said on several previous occasions. We have no interest in tricking you. First, we have too much respect for your intelligence to think we are able to do so. Secondly, we want an agreement that will last and not one that will break down in a year or two.

I suspect we have gone as far today as we can go. I would like to ask the Minister how he proposes we continue now.

Xuan Thuy: May I have some comments on what you just said? What you just said seems to me to say that if the war is prolonged it is due to us. It appears that the prolongation of the Paris talks is due to us too.

Kissinger: It is fruitless to discuss this.

Xuan Thuy: You see we demanded a complete and unconditional cessation of bombing to begin the four-party talks. You have violated such an engagement. As for us we have continued the four-party talks. And the three parties were ready in Paris in November; only the Saigon Administration was absent.

Kissinger: You are serious and we are serious. I don't doubt we have different perceptions; if not, we wouldn't be at the impasse we are at now. We must do something about the future or remain prisoners of the past.

Xuan Thuy: It is not my intent to review the past, but since you mentioned it, I have to refer to it.

Through your statement, I see you want to separate the military questions from the political questions. You want only to raise the questions of prisoners and military questions. But whatever statement you make you say you should comply with the realistic situation. But there is one reality you don't want to comply with, that is, that you want to interfere in the existing Saigon Administration. We and you should do all we can to do our best to come to the end of the war in all fields. Now we have agreed we should further examine your proposals.

Kissinger: Naturally.

Xuan Thuy: We have to meet again.

Kissinger: Should we set a date now, or get in touch? How much time do you think you need to prepare a response?

Xuan Thuy: It will take a few weeks. I have to look into my program too. Should it be on a Sunday?

Kissinger: Sunday is easiest for me because I can be away from Washington without too many people knowing. In two or three weeks? That would be the 13th or 20th of June.

Xuan Thuy: (After discussing with his colleagues.) We are engaged the coming three weeks. How about June 27th?

Kissinger: That would be very hard for me. After the 20th it is very hard for me until mid-July. June 20th is impossible for you?

Xuan Thuy: I will be engaged.

Kissinger: Or June 21 if necessary.

Xuan Thuy: I have to set my program. I propose we get in contact later.

Kissinger: Is the 27th possible for you? It is impossible for me.

Xuan Thuy: In early July?

Kissinger: I won't know.

Xuan Thuy: We shall get in contact later.

Kissinger: Let me explain the technical side to you. It is very hard for me to come secretly. The next time I propose to go on an official trip to London and come over here from London. To do that I must know about two to three weeks ahead of time to make plausible my trip. A sudden trip to London will raise suspicions and discussions.

There is one other technical difficulty—there is no reason to bother you with these, but just so you know my problem. I have a tentative plan to be the official representative to the inauguration of the President of Korea for July 1. If I do that I am in that area for 10 days. If so, I couldn't be here until mid-July. I say this only to indicate that I am not playing games with you. You should get in touch with General Walters.

Xuan Thuy: Before you go to Korea, can you come here?

Kissinger: I can come June 20th. I know this is difficult for you. I could come on the 21st or if necessary on the 19th.

Xuan Thuy: These few days are very difficult. But you should be in Korea on what date?

Kissinger: July 1.

Xuan Thuy: Can you come before then?

Kissinger: Tell me what dates are possible for you.

Xuan Thuy: The 27th or 28th.

Kissinger: If I go, I know I must leave on the 26th. Therefore it must be before the 26th.

Xuan Thuy: The 26th?

Kissinger: The 25th at the latest.

Xuan Thuy: So you can come on the 25th?

Kissinger: What is the earliest date that you can—I hate to do this—I would like to be cooperative.

Xuan Thuy: For me the best is the 27th. Since we are discussing the 25th, I should review my program.

Kissinger: The 24th is a meeting date (plenary). Is the 23rd impossible?

Xuan Thuy: I shall see.

Kissinger: Let us say either the 23rd or the 25th.

Xuan Thuy: Either the 23rd or the 25th.

Kissinger: The 23rd is much better for me. That I can make definitely.

Xuan Thuy: And the 25th?

Kissinger: I will try very hard.

Xuan Thuy: I will choose which of the two days and inform General Walters.

Kissinger: May I suggest one other thing in the interval. I am certain this will be considered very seriously by your government. Let me propose that both sides avoid inflammatory actions during the interval. I am not asking for assurances. I am just suggesting in order to create a useful atmosphere.

Secondly, of course, if you reject this proposal, there will be no concrete problems. But if in general this is agreeable, if in general this has possibilities, then I would recommend that both sides be prepared to talk concretely on all points and any other points they want to discuss, and also to establish a concrete work program.

I only want to repeat one thing. In our judgment the best possible way to have political impact is to have a military solution this year.

If I can say one other personal thing, one other point. The last time between our first and second meeting your colleague Madame Binh made a public statement.⁸ While this has good propaganda purpose, it makes it difficult for serious negotiations because it forces us to make a public reply.

I have trouble enough with my colleagues to try and tell you how to deal with yours.

Xuan Thuy: In connection with your first point.

Kissinger: What's my first point?

Xuan Thuy: With regard to taking inflammatory actions. I would like to express my hope and desire to observe this. It depends mostly on the NLF–PRG. I will convey this to them.

Kissinger: I understand. It is a suggestion, not a proposition.

⁸ Binh stated that U.S. troops should be withdrawn within 6 months. See *ibid.*, Document 189.

Xuan Thuy: As to your second point. In case your proposal is accepted in general, then next time we should be prepared to discuss all concrete questions. Naturally, we must study first.

Kissinger: Do you think we need more than one day?

Xuan Thuy: Let me study first.

Kissinger: You can tell General Walters concerning the meeting time. It is very difficult to arrange.

Xuan Thuy: As to Madame Binh's statement, she has her right to make a statement. She is very prepared to meet Mr. Special Adviser, but you refuse to meet her.

Kissinger: I will ruin her reputation.

(Mr. Vy talked to Xuan Thuy.)

Xuan Thuy: I would propose also that you should examine our preliminary remarks.

Kissinger: We will do so very carefully, you can be very certain. Very sure.

Is there any possibility that my colleague, Special Adviser Le Duc Tho, will attend these meetings in the future?

Xuan Thuy: I don't know yet. As for myself, if I return to Hanoi, people would like to retain me there.

Kissinger: That's why you must stay here.

Xuan Thuy: So, like you, it is difficult to make trips. It is the same for me also.

(Farewells all around.)⁹

⁹ Kissinger sent a detailed analysis of the meeting in a May 31 memorandum to Nixon and made the following points: "Thuy seemed atypically uncertain, indicating that he believed the U.S. proposals were out of the ordinary and required serious decisions in Hanoi; he was concerned with the absence of a specific withdrawal date and proposal for the political issues; and Kissinger believed that there was a chance of a break-through this summer and a definite DRV decision in one or two more meetings." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1039, Files for the President, Vietnam Negotiations, HAK II 1971) Kissinger also sent a modified version of this memorandum to Bruce on June 5, and Bunker reported in backchannel message 144 from Saigon, June 3, that he informed Thieu about the meeting. (Both *ibid.*, Box 853, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David, Vol. VII)

208. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, May 31, 1971.

SUBJECT

Statements on Ground U.S. Combat Role in Vietnam

Secretary Laird first began speaking about the termination of U.S. ground combat responsibility in Vietnam in January 1970 when he defined the three phases of Vietnamization:²

- The first phase is to turn over the combat responsibility;
- The second phase is to turn over the support and fire power responsibilities;
- The third phase is to phase down the military MAAG mission.

Since January 1970 Secretary Laird has made some 15 on-the-record statements referring to the termination of the ground combat role. On October 8, 1970 the Secretary stated:

—“I anticipate the South Vietnamese by next summer will be capable of assuming responsibility for all ground combat operations.”³

Secretary Rogers picking up on Secretary Laird's remark stated on October 9:

—“I think that by May 1 as the President said, he is going to withdraw 95,000 troops from South Vietnam. By that time most of our forces will be out of the combat role—maybe some in the combat role, but by-in-large they will be out of the combat role by that time.”⁴

The two Secretaries jointly appeared on “Issues and Answers” on October 11 and were pressed as to whether the ground combat role

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 154, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 1 May–31 May 71. Confidential. Haig drafted this memorandum on May 25 using information in a May 25 memorandum to him from Houdek. (Ibid., Box 1043, Staff Files, Houdek Chron, Bob Houdek's Chron May 3–July 71, 2 of 2) Nixon wrote the following across the top of the page: “K—Perhaps we can move up the date for ‘end of ground combat’ and announce it as Dec. 1. Would be interpreted as a change from this. The problem, of course, is not to do anything that will create a constant query as to the nature of our continuing activities (à la Laos). Perhaps the term, ‘No ground combat except in defense of our remaining forces.’”

² According to Houdek's memorandum to Haig, Laird spoke at a news conference in Los Angeles on January 25, 1970.

³ Houdek noted that Laird made this comment at the Civic Clubs of Duluth, Minnesota.

⁴ The statement was made during an October 9 news conference. The transcript is in the Department of State *Bulletin*, October 26, 1970, pp. 471–478.

would end by May 1. Both Secretaries declined to state categorically that the ground combat role would be totally transferred by May 1 and preferred to emphasize that the major portion of U.S. troops would be out of the ground combat role by that date. Administration spokesmen at this time began to point out that while the assigned ground combat role would end with the completion of Phase One, a number of U.S. troops remaining in Vietnam at that time would be assigned a security role to protect the air and logistic forces still in Vietnam during Phase Two.⁵

Secretary Laird when he made his trip to Vietnam in early January 1971 made a flurry of statements on the ground combat role. The most specific of which was in Paris on January 6, 1971 when he stated:

—“We will be in a position in the course of this year where the American combat responsibility will be removed as far as South Vietnam is concerned. We are approaching that position on our May 1 troop ceiling deadline. Now the position of American forces in South Vietnam after the midsummer period of 1971, calendar 1971, will be such that we will have a logistic role.”⁶

You will recall that following that statement, we backchannelled the Secretary and asked him to refrain from discussing the possible date for the termination of the ground combat responsibility and thereby avoid feeding press speculation which had begun to develop. In the Secretary’s subsequent statements during the spring of the year he has avoided referring to any specific date and has simply stated:

—“We expect to complete Phase One by this summer.”⁷

Secretary Laird’s most recent specific statement on this subject was at his April 13th press conference where he stated:

—“Phase One of the Vietnamization program, as far as the turning over of ground combat responsibilities in country, would be completed during the summer period.”⁸

In comparison to Secretary Laird who has discussed this subject some 15 times on-the-record in a little over a year, Secretary Rogers has commented on it publicly six times, usually picking up on a Laird statement made a few days before.

⁵ The transcript of the interview is *ibid.*, November 2, 1970, pp. 542–553.

⁶ Houdek noted that Laird made this statement at a news conference in Paris.

⁷ According to Houdek, Laird made seven similar statements between January 11 and March 9.

⁸ According to Houdek, Laird made the statement at a press conference at the Pentagon on April 13.

209. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (Sullivan)¹

Washington, June 1, 1971, 10:16 p.m.

S: I just got back from Saigon. I wanted you to know that Ellsworth wants to come the middle of the month to go to Yale and get an honorary degree at commencement. I presume we would not deny his coming to get a degree.

K: Sure, I want to see him.

S: I did not want you to think that we were conspiring against you to get him back here and—

K: You are conspiring all right, but not with Bunker.

S: Who with?

K: You should know. No, I am only joking. Is that what the special mission is for.

S: That is what it is all about. The plane and everything. They asked for that before I could get back to put the request through.

K: I have no problem with him coming home. In fact, I want to see him.

S: They got the call on the flight before we were able to get back and confirm it. We had an interesting view out there. I guess Jack Irwin will probably be filling you in on the entire trip.

K: What is your view. You know that area better than he does.

S: I am worried about Cambodia. We were able to go to some of the—as low as the plane would take us—front line positions and if they are hit by anything real we will have some real problems. The rains will probably save them for this season. Thieu seemed surprisingly confident. He had his tail up and high and seems fine. I think the loss of General Tri was a real blow for us and is beginning to be evidenced now.

K: I think that hurt Lamson 719 very much.

S: No doubt. President Thieu indicated some things he was not going to do until his election and then some things he was going to do after his election.

K: Oh really?

S: We flew over the Chup plantation area and that is a hell of a big sanctuary they have in there. I think that death is being felt very much.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 10, Chronological File. No classification marking.

K: That is what killed us. The Tri death was a big blow.

S: It is starting to show now. I believe they are going to have problems inside Military Region III but Thieu does not seem too worried about this and is concentrating up in Military Region II—Binh Fo (phonetic) and that area. He thinks he will be able to turn over to the region people the authority and that his ARVN will be able to take over and cut 12 to 8 ARVN divisions.

K: Bill, we do not want the Koreans out of there yet.

S: I had a long talk on this with Abe.

K: He is as right about that as he was about Lamson 719.

S: I talked with Bill Porter. If he gets a set of instructions for negotiating he thinks he can . . . with the budget and keep two divisions.

K: I talked to the President last night and he feels very strongly about this.

S: I talked to Abe.

K: The military is wrong on this. They are worried about their symmetry of deployment and logistics.

S: Porter doing more and will try and keep those troops in there.

K: Then in 1973 we can pull them out.

210. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, June 4, 1971.

Nixon: I notice the infiltration, for example, and—

Kissinger: Yeah, they're pushing—

Nixon: —I wonder: is he [Laird] cutting down on the bombing?

Kissinger: Uh, no—

Nixon: He knows.

Kissinger: —I told—

Nixon: Put somebody on it. Put it on Moorer, then—

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 512–4. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. The transcript is part of a larger conversation, 9:42–10:22 a.m.

Kissinger: I told—I talked to Moorer yesterday along the lines—²

Nixon: —[unclear] infiltration is up, and we've just got to put it on him, lay it into him.

Kissinger: I talked to Moorer yesterday along the lines of what you said. Uh—

Nixon: What the hell is he bombing? How does—?

Kissinger: Of course, bombing doesn't get the personnel.

Nixon: I know. It gets something; it gets the artillery. For Christ's sakes, they're bringing artillery down there.

Kissinger: Yeah. Well it's—that's one of the results of Laos, that they—this is the stuff that they couldn't send down during Lam Son 719.

Nixon: Now they're sending, sending it down in the rainy season.

Kissinger: Sending it down in the rainy season.

Nixon: It's pretty tough.

Kissinger: [unclear] session, they repeated their demand to have political and military issues settled together, which is what we're trying to separate in my talks. But, that couldn't be an answer, yet. They're just going through their book there. I mean, we go through our formal public position, and they go through theirs.

Nixon: On that Cambodian action there, what's your final assessment there?

Kissinger: In—the Snuol one? Well, that—there's several. One is that division in Snuol, the one that withdrew, is no good.

Nixon: Yeah, we understand what was happening, but was it as bad as—it's not as bad as the press made it out?³

Kissinger: Oh, no, no. The immediate action—the division is no good, but the immediate action, by every account that I've been able

² According to Kissinger's Record of Schedule, he spoke with Moorer from 4:10 to 4:13 p.m. on June 3 but no further record of their conversation has been found. (Library of Congress, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76) Following up on this conversation with Nixon, Kissinger called Moorer on June 5 at 9:37 a.m. and, according to a transcript of the conversation, said, "I would like to sit down with you next week sometime to let our hair down on what is going on out there. Secondly, before that happens, I have the impression that the enemy is really building up in I Corps. We cannot afford another shellacking. I don't give a damn about the autonomy of the field commander. We have to avoid another set of debacles here. Maybe we need another field commander. We cannot have these reports that are, in fact, misleading." Moorer agreed, to which Kissinger replied, "Something isn't right out there. We may have withdrawn a little too fast." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 10, Chronological File)

³ "Snuol Battle Said To Have Reduced Viet Force by Half," *The Washington Post*, June 4, 1971, p. A16.

to get, in any normal press reporting, would be a—would be considered a success. They inflicted very heavy casualties on the North Vietnamese. They were withdrawing anyway. They weren't pushed out of Snuol. They were going to their positions in South Vietnam for the rainy season. The South Vietnamese are under orders until October to avoid casualties. Thieu has already told Bunker. That is, right after the election, he's planning measures to anticipate North Vietnamese offensives. But, I think, on the whole, it was a very successful operation. And, in—in that part of the country, the North Vietnamese have been taking exorbitant casualties. Now, unfortunately, without—if Tri hadn't been killed, those units wouldn't have been there anymore. He was in the process of defeating them. Incidentally, I talked last night—I think that's an interesting change. First of all, I don't know whether you've seen today's news summary—about three pages on SALT. I mean, that story is just going on and on. But that was a group of East Asian scholars, to whom I agreed to talk three months ago—

Nixon: Um-hmm?

Kissinger: —really just to show the administration flag.

Nixon: Hmm?

Kissinger: About 100 of them, from all over the country. There's an East Asian society or something like that—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —[John] Fairbanks, and [Edwin] Reischauer—all, all the big names.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: [Frank] Tillman Durdin was there. And, the mood is really amazing, how it has changed towards the administration. Only one question on Vietnam, and a very mild one, and it was the last one. All the questions had to do with China policy. And a bearded, beatnik-type got up and said, "We just want you to know how great it is. What can we do to help the President? What can we do?" [laughs] And for a group of—I'm not saying they're going to vote for you—

Nixon: If they saw this, they'd have been standing on the chairs.

Kissinger: Well, for the—when, when this comes out—I mean, it doesn't have to—when the results of this come out, the fact of it doesn't have to come out.

Nixon: Oh [unclear] I know. In fact, there's [two?] but, I mean, the results—

Kissinger: When the results come out, they're going to be climbing walls. But, the whole mood has changed. I don't know whether

you saw the Oberdorfer article in *The Washington Post* today, that you're going to be the peace candidate of '72?⁴

Nixon: Hmm.

⁴ Don Oberdorfer, "Nixon in '72: Peace Candidate," *The Washington Post*, June 4, 1971, p. A21.

211. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, June 7, 1971.

Kissinger: Well, on the Delta, I talked to our commander there, who is one of our few good ones—General Cushman²—when he was here about six weeks ago. And he said there's slightly more enemy activity, but, actually, that the situation is under good control. And him, I tend to believe. I wouldn't believe a word Abrams says anymore.

Nixon: I know.

Kissinger: And—

Nixon: You've got to go directly to the local [unclear] commanders from now on.

Kissinger: Except that—except for Cushman, he's put second-raters in as corps commanders—Abrams—

Nixon: Yeah, okay. Well, at least, there's one. What about [unclear]?

Kissinger: Second, that Thieu had a conversation last week with Bruce—with Bunker, in which he outlined his plan for after the election, and he said he could move some of the troops that had been active in the Delta into the more threatened areas, because they had cleaned out the base areas.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 511–1. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. This exchange is part of a larger conversation, 9:43–11:05 a.m.

² Major General John H. Cushman, from May 1971, head of Delta Regional Assistance Command and thus senior U.S. military adviser in Military Region 4.

Kissinger: But I don't think the Delta is our worst area—is our big problem—

Nixon: When these guys are out running around, they don't know anything, of course. [unclear]

Kissinger: Our problems are I Corps, and with that incompetent they've put in to replace Tri—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —it may start acting up in III Corps again.

Nixon: Yeah. Yeah. What about the other points [unclear]?

Kissinger: And we talked about that yesterday. That's absolutely—we're going to do that.

Nixon: Okay [unclear].

Kissinger: We've got the plan. We've got more amm—

Nixon: At least we'll hit them hard.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: I want the—I want them to be out there, loading hard and fast, because we're really going to crack the bastards.

Kissinger: Absolutely. And I agree with you on the other point.

Nixon: It's one of those things that—

Kissinger: That's just—

Nixon: —but sometimes is not particularly friendly, then, in terms of the war situation, but, they're accurately reflecting what the attitude of the people are. We're just at that time when even that attitude isn't going to budge us, but it will—it could very well budge Senators, Henry. That's my point—

Kissinger: I talked to MacGregor³ this morning about—

Nixon: Good.

Kissinger: —McGovern–Hatfield—⁴

Nixon: What does he say?

Kissinger: He thinks we cannot—It would be a mistake to try to talk it to death, because it would kill the draft—

Nixon: We assume.

Kissinger: He thinks the vote, now, is 52 to 40 in our favor. And—

Nixon: McGovern–Hatfield?

³ Clark MacGregor was Counsel to the President for Congressional Relations.

⁴ The McGovern–Hatfield Amendment would have required a United States military withdrawal from Vietnam by December 31. It was defeated on June 16 by a Senate vote of 55 to 42.

Kissinger: On McGovern–Hatfield. And he thinks the McGovern–Hatfield one is easy if—

Nixon: And the draft?

Kissinger: No, the draft is all right. Our problem would be the same as the Mansfield one, that somebody comes in with a—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —with a substitute resolution. But, if one of those substitute resolutions—we shouldn't—we should hard-line it. But, it's—to say they took the—what is that Cook–Stevens one, nine months after they released the last prisoners—we wouldn't want that. But [unclear].

Nixon: [laughs] Hell, they aren't going to really release them, or they'd release them today and that could do it.

Kissinger: So—

Nixon: You know—

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: —they can at least start talking. [unclear]

Kissinger: But he said he's actually quite confident—MacGregor—and, you know, he's usually soft on this. I told him even—we can't have it now. He thinks it's possible, if we absolutely must, if we line up Mansfield, to get it delayed for month, but then signals would go up all over the—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —the Senate.

212. Minutes of a Meeting of the Senior Review Group¹

Washington, June 7, 1971, 3:51–4:42 p.m.

SUBJECT

Cambodia

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger
 State
 Under Secretary John N. Irwin
 Mr. Marshall Green
 Mr. Arthur Hartman
 Mr. Ronald Spiers
 CIA
 Mr. Richard Helms
 Mr. George Carver
 Defense
 Mr. Warren Nutter
 Mr. Dennis Doolin
 Col. Morris Brady
 Mr. Francis J. West

JCS
 Gen. William C. Westmoreland
 Major Gen. John H. Elder, Jr.
 Lt. Col. John G. Hill
 OMB
 Mr. James Schlesinger
 NSC Staff
 Brig. Gen. Alexander Haig
 Mr. Wayne Smith
 Mr. John H. Holdridge
 Mr. Robert Sansom
 Mr. John Negroponte
 Mr. Keith Guthrie

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. *Military Assistance Plan.* Building on the JCS plans already requested by Secretary Laird, Defense will submit by July 1 a military assistance plan for Cambodia designed to achieve the objectives set forth in NSDM 89.² The plan should outline strategy alternatives for the FANK and should include a time-phased program for providing the FANK with the necessary training and logistic support. The plan should also propose recommendations for improving the management of the U.S. military assistance program in Cambodia.³

2. *MAP Personnel Levels.* The number of personnel permanently stationed in Cambodia to administer the military assistance program should be determined by the requirements for implementing the plan to be prepared by Defense. Defense (CINCPAC) and State (Embassy

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-112, SRG Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Nodis. The meeting was held in the Situation Room of the White House. All brackets are in the original.

² Document 61.

³ On June 11, Kissinger sent a memorandum to Irwin, Packard, Helms, and Moorer, in which he requested the plan by July 1. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, DEF 19-8 US-CAMB)

Phnom Penh) recommendations on personnel levels should be justified on this basis.⁴

Dr. Kissinger: We were going to get a briefing from the DOD team.⁵

Mr. Smith: Two members of the team are prepared to brief. They are Mr. West and Col. Brady.⁶

Dr. Kissinger: Okay. Can we go ahead then?

Mr. West: I will discuss the enemy threat. Then Col. Brady will brief on the friendly military situation.

In our report we divided the discussion of the enemy threat into two sections—one dealing with the main war against South Vietnam in which the North Vietnamese are using Cambodia as a conduit for men and supplies, and the other covering the subphase involving the North Vietnamese war against the Cambodians. Our assessment is that in the main war the South Vietnamese have gained the strategic offensive in MRs 3 and 4 [of South Vietnam] and in Cambodia.

Dr. Kissinger: Especially in the Snuol area.⁷

Mr. West: We hope that is a tactical aberration. The gains that have been made can be shown by noting that last year there were three NVA divisions totalling 63,000 men on the South Vietnamese border. Now there are only 27,000. This is what we call the force dislocation effect

⁴ In his June 11 memorandum, Kissinger stated that neither a high nor low profile was a principal objective of policy. Key considerations were personnel required to provide assistance, but not training or advice; the ability to implement some of the program outside Cambodia; and whether those on temporary duty could accomplish the mission. On August 13, Laird responded that the JCS had completed the plan on July 1 but that he requested revisions because JCS based it on cost and force levels above that requested for FY 72. (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330-76-197, Box 61, Camb 300-399)

⁵ The DOD team report, entitled "A Department of Defense Assessment of the Military Situation in Cambodia, 18 April 1971-15 May 1971," was prepared in response to Nixon's request on April 8. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-1973, POL 27 CAMB.) Laird forwarded the report to Kissinger under a May 22 covering memorandum. K. Wayne Smith analyzed the report in a May 27 covering memorandum to Kissinger, and noted that U.S. funds and efforts to build up the FANK over the past year had accomplished little. Smith further explained that the FANK were inadequately trained and the GKR had no plan to train them and that 85 percent of FANK were tied down in defensive positions with no offensive strategy and deficient equipment. Smith concluded that FANK had abandoned the countryside to the enemy and allowed a self-sufficient Khmer Communist movement to further organize. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-56, SRG Meeting, Cambodia 6-7-71)

⁶ The third member was Colonel T. Owens, U.S. Marine Corps.

⁷ In a June 3 memorandum to Nixon, Kissinger summarized a report by Abrams on a significant battle near Snuol in which the enemy attacked ARVN forces as they were preparing to withdraw. According to Abrams, Minh reacted quickly, called in reinforcements, inflicted heavy damage on the enemy, and successfully pulled back his forces to South Vietnam to wait out the rainy season. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 155, Vietnam Country Files, Viet June 71)

and comes from the enemy's loss of sanctuary and the resultant necessity to protect his rear area. Also, with the closure of Sihanoukville, the North Vietnamese have to protect their line of communication overland from the north through Kratie. One effect of all of this has been to decouple the guerrillas in MRs 3 and 4. The net attrition [of guerrilla forces] in MR 3 has been 26%. In addition, the North Vietnamese now have to divert 33% of their forces in Cambodia against FANK targets. To sum up, as long as the ARVN keeps pressure against the Fifth, Seventh, and Ninth [NVA] Divisions, which are in the Snuol–Chup Area, the enemy will have to stay on the defensive. However, if the situation there begins to unravel, all bets are off. General Manh of [the South Vietnamese] JGS told me that they are going to keep the pressure on during the wet season. This has allowed the RVN to free its general reserve for use up north. They anticipate using the airborne troops and marines [which make up the reserve] in the north next year while pinning down the Fifth, Seventh, and Ninth NVA Divisions where they are [in northeast Cambodia].

We look for a stalemate in the main war between the South Vietnamese and North Vietnamese in MRs 3 and 4 and in Cambodia. The North Vietnamese will be concentrating on maintaining their supplies, and South Vietnamese control [in MRs 3 and 4] will go up. After 1973, if the enemy succeeds in rebuilding his logistical system and the ARVN provides no more troops, there could be difficulties. Thus, there is a long term problem.

As for the Cambodia subphase, the enemy has the strategic initiative in every way. He has tied down 180,000 Cambodian troops (if there are 180,000 troops in the FANK). It's hard to believe how they really are tied down until you see them just sitting around in towns and camps. The North Vietnamese have the countryside. The question is what they are going to do with it.

We had one team member who spoke fluent Vietnamese. He picked up some interesting information about the conduct of the North Vietnamese toward the Khmers in the countryside. The North Vietnamese have been using the propaganda line: "Judge your enemy by how he acts." This invites contrast with the ARVN, whose conduct in Cambodia has been abysmal.

The North Vietnamese also claim they are supporters of Sihanouk and say the war is between the Sihanouk forces and the Lon Nol forces, who are American lackeys. To enhance their credibility, the North Vietnamese also give the Khmer Communists some nominal authority by allowing them to arrest North Vietnamese soldiers who don't have authority to travel.

Dr. Kissinger: There aren't any North Vietnamese except deserters travelling in Cambodia.

Mr. West: North Vietnamese soldiers are given authorized leave in Cambodia. A rallier explained to us what the procedures were.

Dr. Kissinger: They are not being very generous to the Cambodians by permitting these arrests.

Mr. West: It enables the North Vietnamese to claim that some of the Khmer Communists have control over the North Vietnamese troops.

We came away concerned that the Cambodians had granted the North Vietnamese a one-year suzerainty over the countryside. The Cambodians argued that racism will prevent the North Vietnamese from winning the support of the Khmers in the country.

Now Col. Brady can discuss the military situation.

Col. Brady: Our first observation was confirmed by what we subsequently saw—that is, that combat operations seemed very light. Even where the Cambodians said there had been battles, the physical evidence of combat was missing. This conclusion is supported by the data that less than three percent of the FANK infantry strength was killed in combat during the first year. In general, the enemy is using the economy-of-force technique. He employs small unit (as low as five or six men) attacks to harass. He also launches small fire attacks. The FANK reports these as major engagements. In Battambang Province the FANK was estimating there were 19 enemy battalions. We calculated about one regiment.

We found the FANK was on the defensive. 85% of the units said that their mission was to defend the ground they occupied. Commanders limit their actions to patrols within three kilometers of their camps. Most contacts with the enemy occur along the LOCs. Most of the areas that are regarded as under Cambodian control have in fact been forfeited.

The Cambodian commanders were concerned about shortages of ammunition and equipment. We found a hoarding phenomenon. They wouldn't expend ammunition because of concern about resupply. They were afraid they wouldn't be resupplied before some unplanned engagement might develop. The lack of initiative below the military region level inhibits FANK resupply operations.

Firepower is inadequate. The average battalion has about five mortars, and half of these have no sights. The troops are not trained in the use of the mortars. Instead, they are trained in nomenclature. They never fire more than one round [in training].

Dr. Kissinger: What do you mean by training in nomenclature?

Col. Brady: They have the mortars there and explain the various parts and tell how they work.

In some cases they are using Chinese 82 mm. mortars with U.S. 81 mm. mortar ammunition.

Dr. Kissinger: Does that work?

Col. Brady: The round comes out of the tube.

Dr. Kissinger: How do they aim the mortars that don't have sights?

Col. Brady: Up at Kampol we asked about this. The reply was that the mortars had been used against enemy rockets being fired at Phnom Penh. Then they explained that the unit had an artilleryman who really knew his business. He aimed the mortars, and after about ten rockets the enemy rockets stopped. Thus, they concluded that the mortars must work.

They also told me how they had three platoons go out on patrol, and I asked how they coordinated their mortar fire with those three platoons. They again cited the expert artilleryman, who, they said, always knew where the platoons were located.

They lack even the most basic consideration for integration of fire-power. That is probably why we have such a high use of air sorties there.

Finally, the FANK's training is at low ebb. They need more people who know what they are doing. Only one-third of the officers and one-third of the whole army could be considered trained. They especially need training in infantry and technical skills, such as medical and communication services.

On the plus side, we were able to witness Khmer nationalism, esprit, and fervor. However, we can't say whether they can marshal this effectively against the enemy. They have accomplished a good deal in fourteen months, but it is also apparent that more could have been done.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Gen. Westmoreland) What do you think about all of this?

Gen. Westmoreland: Last year I gave the Cambodians about a 50/50 chance of survival. Now I would say the odds are about 60/40 over the next eighteen months. We can increase the odds by additional assistance. The question is: how much assistance will the political traffic bear?

Dr. Kissinger: They haven't used all they are getting.

Gen. Westmoreland: Because they have been in the throes of organizing a government. They have had growing pains as they have moved away from the monarchy. They are feeling their way. They are developing a strategy, but they haven't applied it well. We are under constraints as to what we are able to give them. Of course, we can't overwhelm them by providing more assistance than they can use. The fact is that they have no logistical system. We should work with them to develop it.

Also, they have no counter-insurgency effort worthy of the name. They haven't made any campaign to wrest control away from the enemy. This is a long-term process. No results will be seen until one year after they start.

Dr. Kissinger: From what I have read in this report, we think there is going to be a stalemate. However, anytime the North Vietnamese want to move, they can run the Cambodians out.

Mr. West: Our assessment was in terms of gains for costs. The Cambodians have no place to go. The North Vietnamese would have to expend an awful lot of bodies in order to defeat them.

Dr. Kissinger: Why would they have to expend a lot of bodies?

Mr. West: Their defensive positions are set up with 18 battalions over three kilometers. The barbed wire has portholes like on a Spanish galleon. They could take the areas the Cambodians now occupy, but they would have to walk over their bodies to do it. What gain would this be to them if they were subject to our air attacks as well as to ARVN counterattacks on the ground?

Dr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Irwin) You were just there. What do you think?

Mr. Irwin: I think it is a good report. The differences we would have would be on how you shade the findings one way or the other. The Embassy is more optimistic [than the DOD team about the Cambodian prospects].⁸

It all depends on what our objective is—on what we really want to do. The implications in this report are that we can solve the problems by increasing the MEDT and by doing more in-country training.

Dr. Kissinger: What do you think about that?

Mr. Irwin: That's true if you could do so, but it might not be possible to get the necessary support from Congress. Even if you could solve the Congressional problem, the Embassy raises questions about the feasibility of undertaking these activities in Cambodia. We come out in favor of continuing a low profile without suggesting any specific figure [for number of U.S. personnel in Cambodia]. We prefer to put in temporary people such as teams from MACV. I gather that three survey teams are there now.

There may be differences in what the report, DOD, and we consider the U.S. objective to be.

Dr. Kissinger: There is a strategy, which we agreed to on October 26, 1970. It is set forth in NSDM 89, which says we will try to preserve half of Cambodia from enemy control and to build up the light infantry capability of the FANK. The ARVN will be used in certain areas, but its involvement will decline as FANK capabilities grow. This is the pol-

⁸ In a July 4 meeting with Kissinger in Saigon, Swank noted that most of his staff concurred with the report but added: "It's only that we were surprised that the West team was surprised. In such a short time you cannot expect miracles." (Memorandum of conversation, July 4 (mistakenly dated June 4); *ibid.*, Box 512, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. XIII)

icy on which the President decided. Unless somebody wants to change it, then it is the one under which we are operating.

No one is going to give us an award for having a low profile if there is a catastrophe next year. No one is going to criticize us for a high profile if we are successful.

Why is it that only 35% of the FANK are trained? I thought that training was being carried out in Vietnam and Thailand.

Col. Brady: It's largely a matter of numbers. Some 28,000 were trained in Vietnam last year. There are additional FANK troops there now.

Dr. Kissinger: I know it's a matter of numbers.

Col. Brady: Then I withdraw my response.

Gen. Westmoreland: We estimate that 75% of the FANK will be trained by the first of October. NSDM 89 was not issued until October 26, so this will have been done in less than a year.

Mr. Nutter: It is a large force to train. It is disturbing that they haven't done as much as could have been done in-country. Another thing that disturbs me is that it took this three-man team to get down there and find out what the situation was. We have people there, but they stay in Phnom Penh and are busy with paperwork. They don't get out. We have trouble locating the equipment we have supplied. Thus, we feel we need more people in-country to keep an eye on things. We don't say that this will solve all the problems.

Mr. Helms: I remember all the talk last year about getting the Khmer Krom to Cambodia. Here we are a year later, and they are still doing all the fighting.

Mr. Green: Last year there was profound gloom about Cambodia. 50/50 odds for its survival seemed optimistic. The situation is better than we projected a year ago. At that time we didn't have any aid program. Now the level is \$285 million. The training program has also grown, although I don't know how many have been trained. We would not have thought the situation would be any better than it is now. It doesn't surprise me that we still have problems.

Dr. Kissinger: They don't give an award for doing as well as possible. They are not going to pay us off on that basis next year.

Mr. Green: Last year in Phnom Penh Cambodian officials were very bland about the war. Now Phnom Penh is under siege, and the attitude has changed. Sirik Matak, who has always been more capable than Lon Nol, is a changed man. I feel they are growing up to the situation. We are better off.

Dr. Kissinger: The question is whether we are getting them the aid which they need. We are pulling out. Next year the moment of truth will come.

For two months I have been trying to get a strategy developed. My nightmare used to be that no thinking was being done in the gov-

ernment about what our strategy should be. Now that we have started doing some thinking, my nightmare is that we will have the best studies ever done but they will be signed on the day the enemy offensive starts. I am going to get a strategy by the end of this month if we have to do it unilaterally over here. We are playing with national treason next year if we don't do so.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Helms) Do you have any views on this?

Mr. Helms: I wonder if we have really advanced much with the FANK since last year. They never seem to fight.⁹ I wonder if we are doing the right thing. I am no military man, but I am concerned that even in small groups the FANK doesn't perform well. One would think you could take 100 men and train them to perform adequately without getting them absorbed in all this glop.

Dr. Kissinger: It is not very consoling to think that racism is going to stop Communist organization.

Mr. Nutter: When you look back at the gloomy picture that Marshall Green was painting about the situation last year, you have to agree that we have bought them a year, thanks to the Cambodian and Laotian incursions and our other actions. What disturbs me is that they haven't used the year as well as they could have.

Dr. Kissinger: Why can't we even match up sights with mortars?

Mr. Irwin: I think the question is why *we* have not done better. The question is how best to go about doing what we want to achieve.

Dr. Kissinger: The CIA and other studies say that the enemy has the capability to attack Cambodia from the middle of next year. The DOD team feels they won't do it. If the FANK could be urged to get moving during this time . . .

Mr. Green: (to Gen. Westmoreland) Have our people been urging the Cambodians on? Has Gen. Weyand been working on them?

Gen. Westmoreland: We have a tripartite [South Vietnamese, Cambodian, and U.S. military) committee. It met twice during May and has another meeting scheduled for June 12. We received a cable yesterday reporting on the last meeting. They got into quite a lot of detail. The tripartite committee has been revitalized.

Mr. Irwin: How has the training been conducted—by individuals or by units?

⁹ In addition to the problems with the FANK, Helms informed Kissinger in a June 4 memorandum that he was terminating the program to form four Cambodian SGUs for use in southern Laos because the recruits were of poor quality with no will to fight. Helms noted that two battalions that had been recruited by Lon Non, Lon Nol's brother, had fought badly on the Bolovens Plateau and been AWOL since April. Helms believed that Lon Non had intended to use them as cover for his narcotics smuggling operations. (Ibid.)

Gen. Westmoreland: Both ways. 33 battalions have been trained so far. There will be 43 by October 1. In FY 72 eighteen battalions will be trained.

Dr. Kissinger: Do they fight? Do we have any indication about that?

Gen. Westmoreland: I have no details or statistics on that.

Dr. Kissinger: Given the force ratios the team brought back, why can't the FANK go out in the countryside?

Mr. West: One thing that struck us is that all orders start at the highest level. All commanding officers talk about awaiting word from the highest level.

Mr. Doolin: Part of it is the lack of organic firepower. You can't ask a unit to operate without an artillery screen.

Col. Brady: We saw an aggressive brigade operating at Pichnil Pass. It was clearly an untrained outfit. They had five radios to each battalion and only a few medium mortars. Even though the operation was put together as non-professionals would do it, they did fight. I think with equipment and firepower (it wouldn't have to be air support), they would fight. The nationalist fervor is there, but nobody has thought very hard about how to get the job done now.

Dr. Kissinger: In contrast to us.

Mr. Green: (to Gen. Westmoreland) Do you see something coming out of the tripartite committee that will lead to an action-oriented approach?

Gen. Westmoreland: I do feel that we need more equipment delivery teams. We need to develop a long range program for training individuals in units. There are many advantages to training their people as units.

Mr. Green: Could they be used in operations in Vietnam to gain experience?

Gen. Westmoreland: They could be used in training exercises. In South Vietnam they have the facilities, the knowhow, and the where-withal.

Dr. Kissinger: I think we have three different problems: (1) logistical support and training for the FANK, (2) what strategy the FANK should pursue, e.g., whether FANK should permit 85% of its forces to be tied down in defensive positions, and (3) how the U.S. Government should organize itself to reach its objectives.

With regard to the first problem, what keeps us from getting a program that would provide some criteria for judging what units and equipment we ought to have—measured against some sort of time scale? If we had that, at least we would get a sense of how well we were doing in reaching our objectives. I couldn't get from this paper any sense of what kind of force we think we are supporting. This task can be done unilaterally.

Gen. Westmoreland: JCS can do it.

Mr. Nutter: The Secretary [Laird] just sent a memorandum to the JCS asking them to draw up a program.

Mr. Doolin: We will need until July 15 to prepare a really good paper.

Dr. Kissinger: We are running up against a time limit.

Gen. Westmoreland: We can get it for you by July 1.

Dr. Kissinger: How do we handle the strategy question?

Mr. Nutter: This is part of what we are looking at. We have asked the Joint Staff to develop a plan for training and logistics to implement our strategy.

Mr. Irwin: The point is whether we should consider having a larger number of people in Phnom Penh or should concentrate on training in other countries. This is the sort of guidance I would think that Westy [Gen. Westmoreland] would want in drawing up his plans.

Dr. Kissinger: The President's view is that we should do what is necessary to get the job done. He doesn't think he will get any awards next year for keeping our profile low if the North Vietnamese sweep all over Cambodia. Of course, a high profile is not our objective. However, the President is not inclined to have artificial restraints on manpower.

Gen. Westmoreland: We studied this in detail. We feel our request is a modest one. It would involve 93 people in Cambodia and 20 in Saigon.

Dr. Kissinger: How many do you have now in Phnom Penh?

Gen. Westmoreland: 23 permanent plus 10–12 temporary.

Dr. Kissinger: Then we are talking about 70 people. Would you drop the TDY personnel if you got these seventy?

Gen. Westmoreland: The situation would not be the same as it is now. As a general statement, I can say that we would not have as many temporary people.

Mr. Nutter: Secretary Laird is thinking in terms of 50 people.

Dr. Kissinger: Frankly, I must say that compared with what we will be up against next year, this seems like a subsidiary issue. At least, let's get a figure we believe in and get it down on paper. We have to get this implemented in July. We don't have much time.

Mr. Irwin: There is a different view in the Embassy of what we need.

Dr. Kissinger: Let the Embassy make its case in terms of what is needed to carry out our objectives. Let the military make their argument. This dispute has been going on since the Cambodian operation last year.

I think we have gone about as far as we can go today.

(to Gen. Westmoreland) Westy, the more of your paper that you can break out ahead of schedule the better.

Mr. Doolin: The MAP reassessment will be ready June 29.

Dr. Kissinger: Can you take a week off of that, since we are already taking two weeks off the deadline for the strategy paper?

Gen. Westmoreland: I should point out that during Congressional hearings, DOD representatives said that we would have 100–150 men in Phnom Penh. What we are asking for is a lower number.

Mr. Green: We can cite other and lower figures that our people have used in hearings.

Dr. Kissinger: The worst thing that could happen would be for us to put \$300 million into Cambodia and for some newsmen or Congressional investigators to come out with a report like this one [the DOD team report].

Mr. Green: That is true if you can relate the size of our mission to attaining our objectives. The question is whether doubling or tripling personnel will do it. I asked our Ambassador about this.

Dr. Kissinger: He doesn't want any more people.

Mr. Irwin: The Embassy also feels the group they have now is too high in rank and that this makes it seem that our intention all along was to build up the mission. They also point out that there is only one guy who speaks French.

Dr. Kissinger: Let's get Swank's argument and the other argument. If the mission is top-heavy, let's get the right people out there.

Mr. Nutter: I don't believe the Embassy is right about the question of rank. The highest man out there is a colonel. There are lieutenant colonels and majors, but you have to have someone who knows what they are doing to get the job done right.

Col. Brady: I think the question of rank isn't that significant. They are interested first in getting the job done. They are all out there when planes are to be unloaded.

Mr. Irwin: Then again you get a different impression out there. I understood that the unloading was mostly being taken care of by sergeants.

Dr. Kissinger: That's how it was when I was in the army.

Mr. Nutter: One problem is tracing the equipment we provide.

Mr. Irwin: The Embassy says there is no reason you can't have frequent spotchecks by visiting teams.

Dr. Kissinger: I think the main thing is to get a program and a strategy. Then we can discuss how to do it.

Mr. Green: I wouldn't overlook having this [tripartite] committee pass the word to the Cambodians at the top. A little plain talk with Lon Nol might help. I don't think we have to worry about the Cambodians' morale at this point.

213. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, June 8, 1971.

SUBJECT

Memorandum From Secretary Laird on POW's

Secretary Laird has sent you a memorandum (Tab A)² expressing his concern that we may get trapped by the North Vietnamese on the POW issue. The Secretary makes the following points:

—We have given great emphasis to the POW's.

—There is a growing possibility that the families may turn against us on this issue and call for a withdrawal date, thus (he fears) turning public opinion at large against us.

—The North Vietnamese may try some maneuver which would embarrass us and which could, if they are clever, make us give up more than they are already asking:

—For example, they could indicate that they would "release" our POW's at a specified time if we would set a date.

—Or, even worse, they might offer a release date in exchange for a U.S. commitment to end all military aid to South Vietnam and to grant economic aid to all the countries of Southeast Asia, including North Vietnam.

—In order to preempt such a Hanoi move, the Secretary believes it is urgent "that we review again the question of linking release of prisoners to troop withdrawal and the setting of a date certain for U.S. withdrawal." He believes this is "our only hope for avoiding damaging concessions."³

All of us have from time to time wondered why Hanoi does not propose the kind of bargain Secretary Laird fears. We do not know the reason, but we suspect it is because the North Vietnamese want more for the POW's than just a U.S. withdrawal. They also want us to turnover the South Vietnamese Government, which they may fear they can no longer do themselves. They may also want to build more

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 121, Vietnam Subject Files, Viet (POW), Vol. II. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen." Smyser sent this memorandum to Kissinger under a June 4 covering memorandum, recommending that he sign it.

² Attached but not printed is a memorandum from Laird to Nixon, May 17.

³ Nixon highlighted this paragraph and wrote the following: "K—note! He is right on the political problem however."

steam under the issue before they actually do offer release of POW's, although they are obviously also under some time pressure if they want to have a devastating effect on the upcoming South Vietnamese elections.

As you know, the Laird memorandum has been overtaken by our recent initiative. In addition, he is also writing for the record.

214. Memorandum for the Record¹

Washington, June 8, 1971.

SUBJECT

Minutes of the Meeting of the 40 Committee, 8 June 1971

PRESENT

Mr. Kissinger, Mr. Mitchell, Mr. Packard, Mr. Johnson, Lt. Gen. Richard T. Knowles, and Mr. Helms

Messrs. John Irwin, William Sullivan, Mark Pratt, Thomas Karamessines, William Nelson, and John Holdridge were also present.

Laos

Mr. Kissinger opened the meeting by asking what was to be considered specifically.

Mr. Sullivan: We should probably stick to the Clay Report² itself as the later meeting will cover other aspects.

Mr. Kissinger: We have only just received the Secretary of Defense comment and the attachments and I haven't had time to study it.³ You

¹ Source: National Security Council, Nixon Intelligence Files, 40 Committee Meetings, Minutes 1971. Secret; Eyes Only. Jessup prepared the memorandum on June 10. Copies were sent to Mitchell, Packard, Johnson, Moorer, and Helms. According to Kissinger's Record of Schedule, the meeting ran from 3:11 to 4:14 p.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76)

² Report prepared by an interagency Ad Hoc Committee, chaired by General Frank Clay, in response to the 40 Committee's instructions on March 31. (See Document 172.) Moorer forwarded it to Laird under covering memorandum JCSM-190-71, May 3, and Laird circulated it to Rogers, Mitchell, Moorer, Helms, and Kissinger on June 8. (Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, 40 Committee Meetings)

³ Haig forwarded the Clay Report to Kissinger under a June 8 covering memorandum, noting that Laird had just sent it over for the meeting that afternoon and the NSC staff had had no time to review it. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 549, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. VII (Pt. 2))

will note that this was all triggered by Mr. Helms' paper at San Clemente in March. Actually, our problem is how to continue paramilitary operations in Laos when we are in the process of scaling down in Vietnam and how to conduct a substantial covert effort within a satisfactory framework.

Mr. Packard: Well, our paper doesn't alter much. DOD will move to provide logistical support, and the conduct of the operations will be left as they were—run jointly by the Ambassador and the CIA. We will unify the logistics from Udorn.⁴ That's about the only course there is to follow.

General Knowles: Our earlier problem was that the support requirements were not synchronized with the DOD budget cycle . . . You will note that Secretary of Defense has directed CINCPAC to prepare detailed plans . . .

(There was a brief exchange about the title for the new logistic setup with Mr. Johnson saying that a "warlike" title might raise hackles on the Hill. It was agreed that the nomenclature could be tackled in another forum.)

Mr. Kissinger: Does this meet the original concern of Mr. Helms?

Mr. Helms: The answer is yes. However, the question of vital air support is not made clear by Secretary of Defense's cover letter.

Mr. Packard: Well, that means we have to allocate our air resources with care. We just don't have enough to provide for everything.

Mr. Helms: Where are the A-1's to be based and how are they to be supported? Will this be at the same level? The Secretary of Defense's memo categorically states "that A-1's will be devoted to Vietnamization as planned."

Mr. Packard: All air support has to be within programmed resources. We have to balance our allocations between North Vietnam, the Panhandle, etc. The T-28 problem is under study and here the Lao-tian pilot training will also be a factor . . . These specifics could probably be modified.

Mr. Kissinger: I remind all of you we are trying to get through the next year. From what you say A-1's will not be available.

Mr. Packard: We might better leave the air supply question until after the second meeting.

⁴ Both Moorer and Laird in their memoranda transmitting the Clay Report endorsed giving the Ambassador "overall responsibility for all US actions in Laos" and the CIA Station Chief control over "irregular operations." They also endorsed having CINCPAC and COMUSMACV organize a headquarters in Udorn, Thailand, that would coordinate U.S. air support for operations and validate the logistic requirements.

Mr. Kissinger: You should be aware that higher authority does not want any severe setbacks in this theatre during the coming months. Are the procedures outlined acceptable?

Mr. Karamessines: I should like to say that without the A-1's and with the T-28's "under study" we might well be caught short.

Mr. Kissinger: What is the price we are paying? Is it a question of money? Can we use something else? We should probably hold the A-1's until the next rainy season.

Mr. Karamessines: These aircraft are extraordinarily useful. They are vital to the irregulars. A critical diminution could occur at a time when we are already on notice that this area has been coming apart at the seams.

Mr. Helms: I thought that higher authority wants to save the remainder of Laos.

Mr. Mitchell: I agree but Mr. Packard seems to have another point of view.

Mr. Packard: It is not my view that higher authority wants to wind down in Vietnam and escalate in Laos.

Mr. Mitchell: Everything I have read indicates that the air support is a must.

Mr. Packard: But not including increases . . .

Mr. Sullivan: A possible increase would be a helicopter lift.

Mr. Johnson: Well, the whole thrust looks to me like reduced tactical air support.

Mr. Packard: There's always been a considerable amount of emotion in all A-1 discussions.

Mr. Kissinger: Is the general position acceptable? (Those present assented.) How quickly can this be effected?

General Knowles: It is already under way.

Mr. Kissinger: How is the programming and funding to work?

Mr. Packard: This envisages DOD budgeting for support and CIA paying the "direct costs" in Laos.

Mr. Helms: I notice a distinction between Laotian regular army and the irregulars. I thought this was no longer an issue.

General Knowles: Well, yes, it is. We find that in the long run regulars will fight for their country; you can count on them.

Mr. Kissinger: Could you provide any example of the FAR standing their ground?

General Knowles: Not off the cuff, but what I'm saying is that in the long term the regulars will do better when trained.

Mr. Sullivan: The FAR may once have stood their ground near Luang Prabang, but unless you sack or exile everybody above the rank

of colonel, the outlook is forlorn and political realities in Laos will not permit any such radical surgery.

Mr. Kissinger: These studies can proceed, but we must keep on with the main business at hand.

(At this point the meeting melded into an SRG gathering which was to confront the problem of what USG policy on Laos is to be. The minutes of this meeting were taken separately and are available elsewhere.)⁵

Comment: The meeting suffered to the extent that the Secretary of Defense memorandum arrived less than two hours before the meeting, and some of the principals did not have time to digest same. Also, some of the determinations above would depend in part on the outcome of the meeting which immediately followed.⁶

Peter Jessup

⁵ See Document 215.

⁶ In a June 25 memorandum for the record by Jessup, reporting on a meeting of the 40 Committee on June 22, Johnson noted that at the June 8 meeting he had questioned the wisdom of having a military coordinator in Udorn interposed between the Embassy and the 7/13th U.S. Air Force, but that this was not in the minutes and that the issue needed to be resolved once CINCPAC produced its detailed plan on the arrangement. (National Security Council, Nixon Intelligence Files, 40 Committee Meetings, Minutes 1971)

215. Minutes of a Meeting of the Senior Review Group¹

Washington, June 8, 1971, 3:36–4:25 p.m.

SUBJECT

Laos

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

Mr. U. Alexis Johnson

Mr. John N. Irwin

Mr. William Sullivan

Mr. Arthur Hartman

Mr. Mark Pratt

Justice

Attorney General John Mitchell

Defense

Mr. David Packard

Mr. Warren Nutter

Rear Adm. William R. Flanagan

JCS

Gen. William C. Westmoreland

Brig. Gen. Foster L. Smith

CIA

Mr. Richard Helms

Mr. William Nelson

Mr. Thomas Karamessines

NSC Staff

Mr. John Holdridge

Mr. Chester A. Crocker

Mr. Keith Guthrie

Mr. Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. *General Strategy.* The SRG agreed that the U.S. should seek to negotiate a standdown in North Laos which permits Meo retention of the Long Tieng area (Option 3 of the Laos Ad Hoc Group Study of May 13, 1971).² However, in the event a standdown cannot be achieved or is violated by the enemy, the U.S. should be prepared to augment military support to permit Vang Pao to hold Long Tieng over Lao Patriotic Front and North Vietnamese opposition (Option 1 of the Laos Ad Hoc Group Study).³

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-112, SRG Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Nodis. The meeting was held in the Situation Room of the White House. All brackets are in the original.

² Sullivan forwarded the study, entitled "Principal Policy Alternatives for North Laos," to Kissinger, Packard, Moorer, Johnson, and Helms under a May 17 covering memorandum. The underlying assumption of Option 3 was that the DRV and LPF would be more flexible in practice than they had been with their opening position of insisting that the United States end all its bombing in Laos. (Ibid., Box H-56, SRG Meetings, Laos 6-8-71)

³ The study indicated that Option 1 would involve much more effort, greater Thai participation, and increased costs. The other options were as follows: 2) Keeping the Meo (Hmong) in Long Tieng, which would initially require the United States and Lao forces to maintain their existing defensive posture, but as they reduced their military actions would eventually entice the enemy into reducing its forces; 3) Described in footnote 2 above; 4) Negotiating with the enemy in conjunction with a U.S./Lao military stand-down that would be followed by an evacuation of the Meo (Hmong) from Long Tieng; and 5) Withdrawing the Meo and having the Laotians and Thai take over defense of the region.

2. *Scenario*. A scenario to implement the above strategy will be prepared by the Laos Ad Hoc Group and will be submitted to the President for approval. The scenario should spell out the steps necessary to trigger negotiations for a standdown and should list actions which the U.S. must take in order to retain the flexibility to shift to Option 1 as rapidly as the situation may require. Such steps would include movement of additional Thai and Laos SGUs into the Long Tieng area, increased FAR participation in the defense of Long Tieng, and earmarking U.S. tactical air assets for use in North Laos if needed.⁴

Dr. Kissinger: Bill, why don't you start off by outlining for us the options presented in your paper [Principal Policy Alternatives for North Laos]?

Mr. Sullivan: Okay. I'll start with the problem as we see it. Basically, we've run out of the two assets that we had: local manpower and territory.

Dr. Kissinger: Otherwise we're in good shape!

Mr. Packard: We never had money anyway!

Mr. Sullivan: So long as we had the hills and valleys leading up to the Plain of Jars, we were able to do more with a lot less people. The guerrilla groups were able to move behind the enemy's lines. Now the Meo forces are compressed in an area west and south of the Plain of Jars. A static war has developed, in which the Meo must defend fixed positions against the pressure of North Vietnamese forces that are almost always qualitatively superior. The problem then is how to hold the land between the Mekong and the Plain of Jars. We have to decide how much we are willing to pay for the retention of this territorial buffer zone. Under the highest option, we would continue what we are doing now but would enhance the value of our forces. We would put in [5,000] additional Thai SGUs and 1500–2000 RLA troops. We would also provide better equipment and more air support. This option will be pretty expensive to implement. All factors being equal, and if the money is available and if there is no objection from the Congress, this is the most certain way of holding the buffer zone between the Plain of Jars and the Mekong basin.

We can also go to the other extreme—Option 5. Some of the people who worked on the paper say that the North Vietnamese are not interested in the Mekong Valley but only want to secure the area around the Plain of Jars and near the North Vietnamese frontier. If the Meo fall

⁴ Kissinger sent a memorandum to Rogers, Laird, Helms, and Moorer on June 15, requesting the study by June 21. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-56, SRG Meetings, Laos 6–8–71)

back, the supporters of this option argue, it might be that the North Vietnamese would not follow them down to the Vientiane Plain. Our experience does not bear this out. Even if they did move down, their LOCs would be overextended. Making a defense would then be cheaper for us.

Dr. Kissinger: I don't understand this. If we don't have enough maneuver room now, how does it become easier for us to make a defense if they make a further advance? It makes no sense.

Mr. Sullivan: I am not advocating this option. I'm just putting it forward.

Dr. Kissinger: If our present position is inadequate and if we then fall back to the ridge just beyond the Mekong Valley, from which we can't retreat further, I don't see how we are improving our position. Aren't we compounding the problem by doing this? I understand the first part of this argument about the NVA not following our forces down to the Vientiane Plain, but I don't understand this second part.

Mr. Packard: The only argument you could make is that it creates a logistical problem for the NVA.

Dr. Kissinger: The distance is only about 30 miles.

Mr. Sullivan: About 30 miles laterally and 50 miles vertically.

Mr. Packard: There is something to that. The terrain [between Vientiane and Long Tieng] is difficult. We can't support the Long Tieng line by ground very well. We have to do it by air.

Mr. Irwin: If we pull back from the Long Tieng area we may not have Meo forces to help defend the plain. We may only have FAR forces and additional Thai troops.

Mr. Sullivan: This was simply put in as an option. I think, frankly, that the attention of this group should be devoted to the three central options, rather than to the extremes. These three options involve an effort to produce a standdown or a military pause in North Laos. The common assumption for these three options is that neither side has gained much but that each has expended quite a lot during the last two years. The casualties among the Meo and the Laotian regulars have been heavy. It has also been difficult for us to get support in Congress. The NVA have deployed two-plus divisions in North Laos. They've taken significant casualties (mostly from our air attacks), and they've gained almost nothing.

Dr. Kissinger: What about the offensive in the Long Tieng area last year? Didn't they gain something there?

Mr. Sullivan: They really didn't achieve anything.

Dr. Kissinger: Were they trying?

Mr. Sullivan: They didn't make a committed thrust, but they certainly maneuvered as though they were trying. The problem was that

we raised the ante when we discovered what they were trying to do. Then they didn't have the forces to accomplish their objective.

Mr. Karamessines: We launched the Ban Na operation.

Mr. Sullivan: Lam Son also probably restrained them.

Our assumption is that there might be a willingness on both sides to negotiate a military standdown. There are three potential ways of doing this. Let me say, though, that I think it's a mistake to talk of real negotiations. The North Vietnamese will not permit real negotiations between the Pathet Lao and the RLG until they see how the situation in South Vietnam will bounce.

Our idea is for the talks to provide the rationale for a standdown. The talks could take place in Khang Khay. We would then seek a cease-fire in Xieng Khouang Province, where Khang Khay is located, and perhaps in Sam Neua Province as well. This [proposal for a ceasefire in the area where the talks are to be conducted] is in essence the proposal the North Vietnamese finally came down to last year in the preliminary discussions. Now, however, they are proposing a complete cessation of bombing in all of Laos.

We think it would probably be feasible to get an agreement for the talks to take place even if they don't get anywhere. This [preliminary agreement] could involve a halt to North Vietnamese movements into the area, cessation of our bombing although not our aerial reconnaissance in the area, and cessation of forward actions by our friendly forces.

Souvanna would have several bargaining chips in the talks. These would include pulling back his own forces (Meo and FAR) that are now forward of the Plain of Jars, withdrawal of the Thai units, and cessation of U.S. bombing and Lao military air operations. These are all features that can be thrown into the kitty.

We also have to consider the movement or retention of the Meo. Vang Pao wants to move his people to Sayaboury unless the situation becomes more secure where they are. We feel that with a military standdown his people could retain Long Tieng. It is essential to remember that if we lose the territory down to the Mekong Valley, the fighting may come close to an area where our SEATO commitments (the Rusk-Thanat agreement, SEATO Plans 5 and 22) would be triggered. This territorial strip is valuable. It's also important to keep the fighting away from an area where we have definitive obligations to the Thais under SEATO.

We should therefore improve the defense of the Long Tieng area. This could only be achieved during the rainy season—which is starting now.

Our proposal involves having the U.S. encourage Souvanna to go ahead with the talks. We may also have to restrain some of his right-wing military officers from upsetting the applecart. If these officers are convinced we are trying to retain the territory, they will go along. On

the other hand, if they felt this was going to be a sellout, they would resist. My view is that the only sort of standdown that is acceptable would include a clear understanding that the Meo would remain in place and would retain Long Tieng and the whole complex north and east of the Plain of Jars. We think this is worth trying for this rainy season. If we fail, we can go back to Option 1.

Dr. Kissinger: You say we should try to do this during the rainy season. Do you mean Souvanna should try?

Mr. Sullivan: Yes. But he hasn't had a clear signal from us yet about the support we would give him. We've never told him we would be willing to suspend bombing operations in North Laos in order to facilitate talks.

Dr. Kissinger: What do you think, Dick?

Mr. Helms: Damned good summary of the situation.

Mr. Packard: I think we should give this a try. If it doesn't work, we can go the other way.

Dr. Kissinger: What would we have to give up if we do this?

Mr. Sullivan: We would give up the prospect of keeping their heads down—something which is done for the most part by our aircraft. We run the risk that they will build up an overwhelming force for a confrontation at Long Tieng.

Dr. Kissinger: This would probably be next March?

Mr. Sullivan: Yes. But because of our intelligence, I don't think they could surprise us. If we see them building up their supplies, we could bring in SGUs. (to Gen. Westmoreland) Don't you think so?

Gen. Westmoreland: I agree with you.

Mr. Irwin: As I understand it, one reason that Luang Prabang could be defended is that the enemy outran their logistical support. Basically, I agree with what Bill is saying. There *is* a risk that the enemy could build up his supplies. Even if he doesn't bring in any more troops, he could have a greater logistical capability than before.

Mr. Sullivan: There certainly is at least a minimal risk.

Mr. Packard: That's one chance we just have to take.

Mr. Irwin: I'm perfectly willing to take it.

Dr. Kissinger: Can Souvanna survive it?

Mr. Mitchell: (to Mr. Sullivan) What effect could these rightist officers you just talked about have on Souvanna?

Mr. Sullivan: If we give them assurances, they may not overthrow Souvanna Phouma.

Dr. Kissinger: Let's be realistic. If we see a big build-up developing and we move with characteristic smartness, we will come up with six options, which will later be pared down to three. Can we bring the

SGU units and air support to bear on that situation in time to make any difference?

Mr. Sullivan: Yes, if we continue the training programs we have under way.

Mr. Irwin: (to Mr. Sullivan) I have a question. Bill spoke about the risks if this doesn't work. He said that in that case we could go back to Option 1. The real question is what we really think we can do to increase military support, in the Long Tieng area, considering at the same time our problems in Vietnam and in obtaining support from the public and Congress. How realistic is it to say that we will go back to that area with sufficient force to do the job? This option is open to us, just as right now we have the option of augmenting the forces in North Laos. But what it really means is that if Vang Pao's forces are eroding so badly, we bring in Thai troops to a much greater degree than they have been used in the past. Are the Thais willing to do this, especially when they see us planning to withdraw from Vietnam and Thailand?

Dr. Kissinger: I thought we stopped the drawdown in Thailand.

Mr. Irwin: I had the impression it was continuing.

Dr. Kissinger: It was my impression that there was to be no further drawdown there. Has that changed?

Mr. Packard: We are keeping some tactical air units there, just in case we need them.

Dr. Kissinger: But I had the distinct impression that we stopped the drawdown.

Mr. Sullivan: When I was out at CINCPAC recently, I saw a fiscal guidance paper that indicated that drawdown was continuing. Of course, that may have been changed subsequently.

Adm. Flanagan: We are making some studies. The idea is to have forces of comparable effectiveness.

Dr. Kissinger: This is the most extraordinary thing. We seem always to be able to cut forces without reducing effectiveness. I want to know if the forces will still be there when the studies are completed. Are you going to let the President know about this?

Adm. Flanagan: Yes, this would be done.

Dr. Kissinger: What would be done?

Adm. Flanagan: The decisions would be made subsequent to the studies. The studies are proceeding, but we don't have any specifics yet.

Mr. Irwin: Even if we leave the tactical air units in Thailand, would we be prepared to use them in North Laos?

Mr. Mitchell: I infer from Option 3 that Souvanna and the generals require some sort of commitment from us about what we would do if there is a violation of the standdown. Is this true?

Mr. Sullivan: Not exactly. They don't require a commitment. They do, however, want an understanding of what our reaction would be to a violation.

Mr. Mitchell: We should have resources for whatever we decide to do. Otherwise, this may not be an option.

Mr. Packard: We're looking at the air sortie situation right now. Seamans (Secretary of Air Force) is there getting a first-hand look. We could set up a given number of sortie options. One way of doing this would be to put the sorties in the bank, so to speak. We could authorize a given number of sorties, for example, and not use them during the negotiations. If we needed them after the negotiations, we would be able to do so.

Dr. Kissinger: Last year the margin by which we held Long Tieng was not excessive. If we do what Bill suggests, can we react fast enough to hold the situation in the event of another attack? The enemy build-up will be ambiguous for a few weeks, and our intelligence doesn't work that fast.

Mr. Sullivan: We assume that the North Vietnamese will be withdrawing one division [from North Laos] during the rainy season. We assume that they would not be permitted to bring that division back.

Dr. Kissinger: This would be part of the standdown arrangement?

Mr. Sullivan: We would try to work it that way.

Dr. Kissinger: You think we should try to achieve a military stand-down but keep our capability in the Long Tieng area in order to be able to go to Option 1. As I see it, this is not a question of two choices but of two steps to be taken sequentially.

Mr. Sullivan: The only other possibility is Option 5.

Mr. Packard: I think we should try this option [Option 3]. At the same time, we should also reserve air sorties. I think this approach will work.

Adm. Flanagan: We should also get the RLG involved in the reinforcement of the defensive lines in the Long Tieng area.

Dr. Kissinger: If we scare the NVN too much, they might get desperate.

Mr. Irwin: I don't want to be pessimistic, but I want to point out that we might have difficulty going to Option 1 because of a combination of factors: cost, resources, the attitude of Congress and public opinion. I'm just pointing these things out, but actually I agree with Bill.

Mr. Packard: We also have to consider Vang Pao's attitude.

Mr. Irwin: What do we do if the situation is very bad next March, if the NVN forces have staged a big build. We should recognize that the risks will be much greater at that point.

Dr. Kissinger: We will have lost two or three months.

Mr. Irwin: I'm not saying that we ought to change, but we ought to understand the risks involved in the course of action.

Dr. Kissinger: Bill, why don't you try writing a scenario showing how we trigger Option 3. This should include what we have to do to start negotiations for a standdown. You should also set forth standby actions required to give us the flexibility to go to Option 1. For example, what additional forces, including SGUs, will need to be available? What kind of FAR training is needed? How do we react with maximum speed if we find the other side has violated the standdown? Then we can put this before the President for approval and show him how it can be done sequentially.

Mr. Sullivan: Part depends on what we get out of Congress. If there's a new Cooper-Church or Fulbright resolution or some legal prohibition against the use of our forces there, that's one thing. But if there is something like a Symington Resolution—that is, a dollar limit—we will have to husband our resources.

Dr. Kissinger: I like the bank idea [for air sorties] that Dave brought up.

Mr. Packard: We can do it.

Mr. Johnson: Just be sure you have a deposit in the bank.

Dr. Kissinger: I think we can move forward on this basis. (to Mr. Packard) You are agreed on the organizational arrangement for the other thing [DOD support for CIA paramilitary operations in Laos].

216. Minutes of a Meeting of the Senior Review Group¹

Washington, June 9, 1971, 3:33–4:42 p.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam Military Assessment

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger	CIA
State	Mr. Richard Helms
Mr. John N. Irwin ²	Mr. Paul Walsh
Mr. William Sullivan	Mr. George Carver
Mr. Arthur Hartman	OMB
Mr. Joseph Wolf	Mr. James Schlesinger
Defense	NSC Staff
Mr. David Packard	Col. Richard Kennedy
Mr. Warren Nutter	Mr. Wayne Smith
Maj. Gen. Fred Karhos	Mr. John Holdridge
Lt. Col. W. James Eddins	Mr. Robert Sansom
JCS	Mr. W.R. Smyser
Admiral Thomas H. Moorer	Mr. Keith Guthrie
Brig. Gen. Adrian St. John	Mr. Mark Wandler
Rear Admiral Robert O. Welander	

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. *Summary Analysis of 1972 Enemy Strategies*. The SRG endorsed the conclusions of the June 7 summary paper (Summary Analysis of Probable 1972 Enemy Strategies and Alternative Measures to Cope with the Main Force Situation at 100,000 and 50,000 Mid-1972 U.S. Force Levels)³ with respect to the order of probability of enemy threats and the general need to strengthen friendly forces in MRs 1 and 2 to meet these threats.

2. *Flow Chart on Force Deficits*. Defense is to submit a flow chart showing how friendly force deficits in each military region are expected to evolve over the period between now and mid-1972.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-112, SRG Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. All brackets are in the original.

² Not present at the beginning of the meeting. [Footnote in the original.]

³ Smith forwarded the paper to Kissinger under a June 8 covering memorandum. The paper is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-55, SRG Meetings, Vietnam Assessment 6–9–71.

3. *RVNAF Improvements*. Defense will provide by June 10 for Presidential consideration a plan specifying alternative measures that can be taken to improve RVNAF capability to cope with the threats set forth in the June 7 Summary Analysis.⁴

Dr. Kissinger: At the suggestion of the President, I've asked Attorney General Mitchell to sit in on these meetings until our Vietnam strategy is worked out.

Mr. Mitchell: I'm just sitting in. I'm not supposed to provide the strategy.

Mr. Packard: Why don't we turn the whole thing over to him?

Dr. Kissinger: The primary purpose of this meeting is to see where we agree or disagree about the factual situation in South Vietnam and about the situation we will face next year. We also want to see what we have to do to fix some of the difficulties we will have if the worst case comes about, rather than the predicted case. I think the analytical work that has been done is extremely valuable. I understand that Mr. Walsh is prepared to brief us on the threat section. Col. Eddins, who I understand has done an outstanding job on the military region analysis, will tell us about that; and General St. John will talk about the RVNAF improvement alternatives. Mr. Walsh, do you want to move to the table? Can I assume that you and DIA are in accord now on your estimates?

Mr. Walsh: For the moment.

The threat section in the paper is basically the summation of work that has been done by this group during the last four weeks. We looked at the strategies that the enemy could choose in 1972, and we found that this would depend on two considerations: (1) Hanoi's estimate of the impact of increased military activity on the political situation in South Vietnam and in the U.S., particularly in light of the upcoming elections in both countries, and (2) Hanoi's consideration of its logistical and manpower capabilities—and the constraints on these capabilities. Hanoi will also have to give consideration to the control situation in South Vietnam and to the main force balance in South Vietnam and Cambodia during the next 12–18 months.

As a starting point, we're confident that whatever happens in South Vietnam in 1972, there will be a significant increase in the level of combat.

⁴ In a June 15 memorandum to Irwin, Packard, Moorer, and Helms, Kissinger changed the due date to June 18 and noted that the SRG agreed "that the threat facing RVNAF at probable U.S. force levels in 1972 was serious and that measures should be taken now on an urgent basis to further strengthen RVNAF." (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, DEF 19–8 US–CAMB)

Dr. Kissinger: Unless Clifford ends the war.

Mr. Walsh: By June, 1972, we consider that the U.S. ground force levels will have diminished to the point where Hanoi will be able to meet the South Vietnamese face to face.⁵ Hanoi will be able to mount an operation without risking significant U.S. ground action. Hanoi also sees time running out unless it does something to counter the Vietnamization program before the ARVN reaches full strength. Hanoi has also had a year to rebuild and expand its logistical system in Laos—as well as the experience of operating and defending the system. We feel that Hanoi has a new sense of confidence, resulting in part from the Lam Son 719 operation, where they were able to weather the ARVN's attack without really hurting themselves. This is also indicated by the events of the last few weeks—for example, the activity around Snuol and Phnom Penh. As the U.S. elections approach, Hanoi is given an incentive to use its forces.

From a manpower point of view, Hanoi must pay a cost to execute higher level strategies than protracted warfare. We looked at this, trying to predict the effect U.S. withdrawals would have on the infiltration from the North. As you can see from the table on Page 3, we have estimated infiltration requirements from a low of 70,000 [protracted warfare] to a maximum of 175,000–210,000 [general offensive in RVN and Cambodia]. These figures incorporate enemy manpower requirements for Cambodia and Laos.

Mr. Mitchell: Are these figures through 1972?

Mr. Walsh: Yes. But it really is an annual requirement.

Dr. Kissinger: The 175,000 figure is for an offense in South Vietnam and Cambodia.

Mr. Walsh: Yes. With the lower U.S. force levels, there will be essentially no U.S. ground combat troops. We estimate, therefore, that there will be a decrease in the enemy casualties of about 30 percent. The figures take this into account, and we conclude that from the manpower point of view all of the enemy's strategies become feasible in 1972.

Dr. Kissinger: What about from the logistical point of view?

Mr. Walsh: There's some difference between our own analysis of the enemy's logistical capabilities and the JCS study discussed at the

⁵ In addition to the withdrawal of military personnel, the President wanted to reduce Defense Department and AID personnel in Vietnam, including foreign nationals. Kissinger informed Rogers and Laird in a June 3 memorandum that Nixon wanted a report by June 10 on such reductions. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 155, Vietnam Country Files, Viet June 1971) Irwin submitted an initial report on June 18. (Ibid.) Kissinger sent a memorandum to Irwin on September 10, authorizing the following ceilings: AID direct hire and PASA—633; CORDS and AID civilian—590; and CORDS military—2,028. (Ibid., Box 157, Vietnam Country Files, Viet Sept 1971)

last meeting.⁶ We both see eye to eye on Hanoi's ability to mount offensives in MRs 1 or 2, but we differ on the timing. We think Hanoi can mount an offensive in MR 1 or MR 2 a little earlier than DIA does. But we both think these offensives could be launched by January 1972.

Dr. Kissinger: You mean in either MR 1 or MR 2?

Mr. Walsh: Yes. As for a simultaneous offensive in MR 1 and MR 2, we think they could do this in early 1972, but JCS thinks this would be marginal. We say that an MR 1/Cambodia offensive is feasible on logistics grounds, while the JCS says such an offensive is not feasible.

Dr. Kissinger: What about what's going on in Cambodia now? Would you call that an offensive?

Mr. Walsh: This is the kind of thing we warned about in our earlier reports. The model we have constructed doesn't fit the situation in Cambodia very well. The kind of enemy actions we have seen in Cambodia recently could be called hot high points. What is distressing is what these actions tell us about the relative capabilities of the [NVA and FANK] forces.

Dr. Kissinger: In the light of the West report,⁷ this is not surprising.

Mr. Walsh: Getting back to the briefing, I'd like to mention the control situation in South Vietnam. The GVN control position in MRs 3 and 4 is good enough to make Hanoi think two or three times about conducting an offensive there. The GVN control position in MRs 1 and 2 is not so good. If we see increased enemy offensive activity next year, it will likely be in MRs 1 and 2 because of the poor GVN control there and because of the proximity to North Vietnam. Our net judgment is that there will be further enemy offensive activity in 1972 in either MR 1 or MR 2, though it will perhaps come a little later in MR 2. The worst case would be a simultaneous offensive in MRs 1 and 2.

There are, however, two caveats which I would like to discuss right now. The first is that we feel in the present situation in Cambodia, the enemy has an on-going capability to escalate the military activity significantly any time and any place he wants to. We think that the supplies are there and that the infiltration is sufficient. The NVA could do a great deal of damage even without a major offensive.

The other caveat is that we have always tended to write off MR 3 [as a danger area] and perhaps we shouldn't do so. It would not be too difficult for the NVA to redeploy back to MR 3. They could do this for two purposes—(1) to raise the level of activity in the MR or (2) to make it difficult for Saigon to redeploy the strategic reserve.

⁶ See Document 204.

⁷ See footnote 5, Document 212.

Such a move on the part of the NVA would tie up crucial manpower for the GVN.

Dr. Kissinger: Before we get to possible solutions, does anyone disagree with this analysis?

Adm. Moorer: I believe it is about right in terms of capabilities, that is, the courses of action available to the enemy. I'd like to return for a moment to their logistical capability. I recently had a briefing from Gen. Clay on Commando Hunt 5. This covered all interdictions in Laos since October. It seems that last year was the most successful year we had regarding interdiction.

Dr. Kissinger: Are we sending more helicopter gunships out there?

Adm. Moorer: My point is that this shows the need for more gunship sorties. Our assumption [in these studies] is that the air support continues.

Regarding that incident northeast of Phnom Penh, I found out that the FANK aircraft never lost contact. There were 26 Cambodians killed against 87 North Vietnamese. It wasn't the bad loss that it was first reported to be. I think this incident points out that the Cambodians must get off the roads and must stop letting the enemy come to them.

Mr. Carver: The analysis focused on the timing and danger of a major offensive between now and 1972. We shouldn't forget that the enemy can nibble away at us anytime. Each incident can be small, but the total of all these incidents can be important. While we're focussing on the dangers of an offensive, the enemy can cause trouble with many small incidents, not one of which is really dramatic. However, this could have an important cumulative effect on control in MR 3 and other areas.

Adm. Moorer: Gen. Abrams met on the 8th with President Thieu and told him how we felt about MRs 1 and 2. He mentioned that we thought we could get through the remainder of this year in MRs 1 and 2 with reinforcement as needed but that next year some redistribution of forces would have to be done.

Dr. Kissinger: Does everyone agree that this is the correct analysis of what we could be up against?

All agreed.

Adm. Moorer: It shows what *could* happen.

Dr. Kissinger: We have to protect against the worst. Let's turn now to the military region analysis and to the various improvement alternatives.

Col. Eddins: The essential purpose of this analysis was to estimate for 1972 for 50,000 and 100,000 mid-1972 U.S. force level variants the possible friendly main force surpluses or deficits in each MR and countrywide. My remarks on the friendly forces are keyed to the table at

the bottom of Page 17.⁸ I'd like to make two points that the table conveys, and then I'll comment about what this means with respect to the control situation and earlier studies.

The table is rather busy. However, it shows two points. The first is that the projected friendly main force deficits in MRs 1 and 2 could under some conditions be offset by the surpluses in MRs 3 and 4. The second point is that the two variant U.S. force levels (50,000 and 100,000) have a relatively minor impact on the analysis. On the other hand, the desired MFR⁹ has a major impact.

We postulated that the most probable threat in 1972 would be a major offensive in MRs 1 and 2 and protracted warfare in MRs 3 and 4. We also postulated that the worst probable threat would be simultaneous offensives in MRs 1 and 2 and continued protracted warfare in MRs 3 and 4.

(Mr. Irwin joined the meeting at this point.)

The desired MFR was keyed to several factors including the historical relationship between MFR and GVN control data, RVNAF force quality and the area priority (e.g. MR 3 has priority because the capital is there; MR 4 because it is the food-producing area). As you can see, we come up with quite a big range for the surpluses and deficits in each case.

Dr. Kissinger: If we take the most probable case in MR 1, with 100,000 Americans, we have a deficit ranging from 20–58 battalions.

Col. Eddins: That's right. If there are 50,000 Americans, the deficit range is 25–64 battalions. This gives us a large range of 50–70 battalions.

Dr. Kissinger: Can you define for us what you mean by the high and low MFR?

Col. Eddins: The high desired ratio affords the GVN a good chance of coping with a sustained enemy offensive in such a way that neither a serious control loss or major psychological defeat would ensue. It does not preclude temporary control losses, but these could be re-couped.

The low ratio means the GVN could avoid permanent control losses of serious proportions. However, the low ratio may not preclude the enemy from achieving a major psychological effect by temporarily occupying a principal city.

⁸ The chart lists the amount of RVNAF forces and battalions that would be needed to compensate for the deficits that would be created in MR 1 and MR 2 if the United States reduced its forces to either 100,000 or 50,000 troops.

⁹ Main Force Ratio, the ratio used in the study of "friendly to enemy main force combat strength."

I might add that these deficits are used as indicators; they're not to be taken literally. They show the relative problem, as in the worst case in MRs 1 and 2.

Dr. Kissinger: What is the worst case?

Col. Eddins: A simultaneous offensive in MRs 1 and 2.

Dr. Kissinger: In that case, and with 100,000 Americans, we would be short a minimum of 47 battalions in MR 2 and 42 battalions in MR 1. With 50,000 Americans, we would be short a minimum of 47 battalions in MR 1 and 52 battalions in MR 2.

Col. Eddins: Yes, but there's only a difference of six battalions in these force levels.

Dr. Kissinger: I understand that. But Walsh considers—and everyone agrees—that the enemy would have the capability to undertake a simultaneous offensive in MRs 1 and 2 by no later than March. With those deficits, not even a military genius could win the battle.

Mr. Walsh: You must remember that these deficits may not arise until the middle of 1972.

Col. Eddins: That's right.

Dr. Kissinger: I wonder if we could get a flow chart showing these deficits over the time period we're talking about.

Col. Eddins: We can do that. I think it would be worthwhile. We could also show the deficits country-wide.

If you look at the midpoint of the estimates for the most probable case, there will be a countrywide deficit of 4 battalions, corresponding to a MFR of 2.1. In the worst case, there will be a deficit of 85 battalions, corresponding to a MFR of 1.6. 2.1 is roughly the same as the MFR in the first half of 1969, and 1.6 is a little less than 1968.

Mr. Sullivan: You haven't taken into account the RF and PF forces.

Col. Eddins: We have.

Mr. Sullivan: The RF and PF do have an impact and they should be taken into account in these figures. What happens if you put in the RF in MR 3?

Col. Eddins: We've attempted to grind the impact of the RF and PF into the figures in the process of setting our desired MFRs. There are several factors to consider in regard to the RF and PF forces. They've increased in size, and gotten better equipment. They make a significant contribution to the main force war in MRs 1, 3 and 4. However, since the U.S. redeployment has begun, there has been a degradation in fire-power and mobility. We don't really know how to balance all this out.

Gen. Karhos: But you haven't ground the RF and PF into the statistics. This is a strength-driven analysis.

Col. Eddins: Yes, it is. The only way the RF and PF were taken into account was in selecting the desired main force ratios.

Dr. Kissinger: The main force balance is going against us. According to your analysis, the MFRs [in mid-1972] will be less advantageous than in 1968.

Gen. Karhos: The ARVN had M-1s and carbines in 1968, but now they have M-16s. ARVN's mobility and firepower have significantly increased.

Dr. Kissinger: That may be true of the mobility and firepower of ARVN. But mobility and firepower for the total [friendly] forces in Vietnam has probably decreased [since 1968].

Mr. Sansom: Our assumption was that the ARVN unit of today is as good as a U.S. unit—man for man—in 1968.

Mr. Sullivan: Except that today you are pitting them 2 to 1 against the enemy.

Mr. Sansom: We think it's more accurate to make the comparison between this quarter and the last quarter of 1970 than between this quarter and 1968.

Mr. Irwin: What is the ratio between the ARVN and the NVA?

Mr. Sansom: It's 2.1 [2 to 1].

Mr. Irwin: Would it be the same for U.S. forces?

Mr. Sansom: Yes. The table on page 14 of the study shows the MFRs as they actually existed [in the fourth quarter of 1970].¹⁰

Mr. Smith: The impact of the PF and RF is discussed on Page 12 of the study.

Col. Eddins: The ratio of the RF and PF to the type of units they are normally expected to cope with has increased four times since 1968, except in MR 4. We took this into account in selecting the desired MFRs.

A final point I would like to make is that control losses in both MRs 1 and 2, or in one or the other, are likely in the worst case, even if feasible force shifts are implemented. We can't tell, however, if these losses will be temporary or secular. This does indicate that some of the fixes discussed in Section III of the paper will be helpful.

Dr. Kissinger: Does everyone agree with the military region analysis?

Gen. Karhos: We essentially agree, but I would like to underscore again the point that mobility and firepower are not measured in the analysis. This must be taken into consideration when deciding what fixes are needed.

¹⁰ According to the table, the friendly to enemy ratio—that is, the South Vietnamese main force personnel in relation to North Vietnamese and Viet Cong main force personnel—in MR 1 was 2.7 to 1; in MR 2, 2.8 to 1; in MR 3, 3.9 to 1, excluding 8,700 troops in the strategic reserve and operating in Cambodia; and in MR 4, 2.4 to 1, excluding 2,800 troops operating in Cambodia. In South Vietnam as a whole the ratio was 3 to 1.

Dr. Kissinger: How would you propose to do this?

Gen. Karhos: The ARVN units can move, and they do have good firepower. I don't think that we can say that one unit is twice as good as in 1968.

Mr. Sansom: The issue is whether they have improved. The issue is whether the per man support to ARVN will be sufficient.

Dr. Kissinger: As I understand it, the [desired] MFRs are established on the basis of certain assumptions regarding what mobility and firepower are sufficient and desirable. If the ratios drop, there will be certain consequences unless there are compensating factors. If you say that a drop in MFRs will be made up by [increased] firepower and mobility, that argument I can understand. On the other hand, if you say that there will be a decline in MFRs, while firepower and mobility, as a result of U.S. withdrawals, are declining—or at least certainly not increasing, then I fail to see why we don't have a problem. All the evidence I have seen indicates that firepower and mobility in mid-1972 will be less. What's wrong with this analytical point?

Mr. Sullivan: In protracted warfare, combat is spread out and small scale. In the worst case, there is massing of forces and conventional contact. Presumably U.S. air power has a bearing on this. Has it been cranked into the study?

Dr. Kissinger: I think you're not starting with the right assumption. You're talking about warfare in a limited area. Whether we're talking about the worst case, simultaneous offensive in MRs 1 and 2, or the most probable case, offensive in MR 1 alone, the combat intensity is the same. The difference is that there will be a greater area covered in the worst case. We still define a major offensive the same way. If that is so, then the only difference is that in one case U.S. air power will be used only in MR 1 while in the other, it will be used in both MRs 1 and 2.

Col. Eddins: Protracted warfare will take place in populated areas.

Dr. Kissinger: The desired MFRs are not measured against protracted warfare.

Mr. Sullivan: You used the fourth quarter of 1970 as the ratio, but this isn't valid because the enemy didn't have the capability to wage intensive warfare then.

Col. Eddins: That's only for comparative purposes. The selection was based on the table on Page 11 comparing the historical MFRs and control data since 1968.¹¹ The selection of the desired MFR was based on the historical relation of MFR to control.

¹¹ The table illustrates the gains in the ability of the South Vietnamese to control the countryside in MR 1 in spite of a low MFR; the MFR in MR 2 always exceeded the average for the country and MR 3 and MR 4 had the biggest gains in MFR from the enemy being able to move into Cambodia.

Mr. Sullivan: When there is a shift to intensive combat, is U.S. air power included in the MFR?

Mr. Sansom: It's not specifically accounted for. We are in effect saying that it will be the same per battalion as in 1968.

Dr. Kissinger: In the first half of 1968, at the time of Tet, the MFR in MR 1 was 1.1 when there was a massive concentration of enemy forces. Now you're talking of an MFR of 0.7 against the most probable threat during the first half of 1972, with 100,000 Americans.

Col. Eddins: That [ratio of 0.7] is without any force adjustments.

Dr. Kissinger: We have less air power today than we had in 1968. Isn't that right?

Mr. Packard: No. As a matter of fact, we have an excess of close air support. However, there is a problem as regards interdiction.

Dr. Kissinger: Nevertheless, in the worst probable case for 1972, we face an MFR of 0.7, as against an MFR of 1.1 in 1968. We have to make one hell of an allowance for U.S. air power if we say it will be a compensating factor. I admit that when you compare protracted warfare against high points, air power is more effective against high points. But I find it hard to believe that the desired force ratios can be lower for a high point than for protracted warfare.

Mr. Packard: We all agree that there's a deficit in MR 1. But the situation in all of Vietnam is not as bad as it was in the first half of 1968.

Col. Eddins: That's correct. The [overall] MFR is about 2.1 now.

Dr. Kissinger: I agree that we're better off, except in MR 1.

Mr. Packard: This points to the need for force shifts. It doesn't say that the overall situation is bad. Of course, it doesn't answer the question of comparing ARVN divisions against our divisions (in terms of firepower and mobility).

Dr. Kissinger: Firepower and mobility favor the American divisions, I suppose.

Col. Eddins: Primarily in helicopters and airlift capability, not particularly in artillery. The ARVN now have their own artillery.

Mr. Irwin: This leads in turn to the question of the composition of our 100,000 man force. How important is the proportion of support to combat personnel?

Dr. Kissinger: The *Washington Post* says we won't have 100,000 men there.

Adm. Moorer: I have some figures here from Gen. Abrams' plans.

Mr. Irwin: When I was out there [in Saigon] recently, I asked about the composition of the force. I was told 70% would be involved primarily in logistical retrograde. Offhand that seems like a lot.

Adm. Moorer: Between June and December, 796 helicopters will come out.

Dr. Kissinger: At U.S. force levels of either 50,000 or 100,000, the ratios in the worst case will be lower in MRs 1 and 2 and higher in MRs 3 and 4 than in 1968. I want to avoid moving out so fast that we invite another major offensive. We got creamed in 1968, or so the public thought. We all know we can't stand another Tet next year. This is the problem we're up against. The worst case, according to Mr. Walsh, is not impossible.

Mr. Packard: The problem is that we have to decide what we can do.

Dr. Kissinger: I'm trying to go at this step by step. If we all agree on the facts, then we can consider what we need to do.

Mr. Sullivan: I agree that the MFR is worse now than it was in 1968. But the PF and RF didn't exist in 1968.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Col. Eddins) What is your answer?

Col. Eddins: We included the impact of the PF and RF judgmentally. That's why we showed a range of possible deficits and desired force ratios. The low range may preclude significant control losses, but it may not preclude psychological losses. The high range, on the other hand, attempts to preclude both. There's also a big range in the deficit in terms of battalions—50–70, at 80 percent strength. This is roughly equal to 27–35 U.S. battalions.

Mr. Walsh: We have done studies throwing in the RF and PF. There are a number of differences, but the trend is the same with either analysis.

Mr. Sullivan: There is no question that if we pull two U.S. divisions out, there would be an effect.

Gen. Karhos: His [Sansom's] paper shows the variables involved and the trend. In that respect, it's good.

Col. Eddins: We have to consider the loss of U.S. combat support elements. On the other hand, there have been compensating improvements: in the control statistics, in the quality and size of the RF and PF, and in the quality of ARVN weapons. We have tried to take these factors into account.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Gen. Karhos) You say the paper shows the trend? But is this trend still above the tolerable limit?

Gen. Karhos: The trend is correct. We still ask, though, how firepower was included. He says it was included.

Mr. Sansom: It was taken into consideration by saying that the ARVN unit of today is as good man for man as the U.S. unit of 1968.

Dr. Kissinger: He doesn't have to show the change in the numerical value of the ratios because of improvements in firepower. If

firepower is no worse, then we can proceed on the basis of the existing ratios.

Mr. Packard: It seems to me that the situation is not as good as we would like. We would like to have a better ratio. This analysis indicates that we're close to a critical situation and that we better get on and do what has to be done.

Dr. Kissinger: Exactly. The worst thing we could do by doing too much would be to waste money.

Mr. Mitchell: (to Mr. Packard) Will our surplus of close air support occur now or in mid 1972?

Mr. Packard: I don't have the figures. But I believe there would be a surplus almost anytime.

Adm. Moorer: Normally only 30 percent of our air resources goes for close air support. During the dry season, this goes up if there is a lot of military activity. During Lam Son, for example, we diverted some of the interdiction missions to close air support. In 1968, we were flying 28,000 sorties a month. Of course, at that time we were also bombing North Vietnam.

Mr. Packard: On the average, there isn't a large percentage of sorties flown for close air support. We might be able to increase it. But we have to figure out some way to keep our surge capability. I think we can maintain adequate close air support. We are looking at the issue now. We should have some recommendations on this by the end of the month.

Dr. Kissinger: Shall we hear now from Gen. St. John?

Gen. St. John: I would like to give you a brief summary of Section III, the Alternative Improvements for RVNAF, but first I would like to say that we accept the analysis of Section II, which indicates the trend of the imbalance in MRs 1 and 2.

There are three general ways we can offset these imbalances: (1) qualitative improvement of existing forces; (2) redistribution of existing forces; (3) possible increases in the total force structure. These alternatives don't imply that we do one or the other; in fact, all can be carried out in conjunction. The qualitative improvements have, I believe, already been discussed by the SRG. This includes such things as better pay, food supplement programs, dependent housing programs, and accelerated promotions. Perhaps instead of a general across-the-board pay increase, there could be a dislocation allowance for combat troops operating an extended distance from home bases. This may help cut down the desertion rate and it would be more manageable for the Vietnamese economy. Leadership has been a great problem area as the ARVN has expanded. We have several programs underway, and we keep pushing. The best program has proven to be one of giving the Vietnamese schooling, training and experience.

Logistics has been another significant area of concern to us. The Improvement and Modernization Program should enhance the capability of the RVNAF. We would like to see measures taken to increase the manning levels of ARVN battalions from the current 78 percent to 90 percent in mid-1972. The spaces are available to do this within the 1.1 million limit. We're now accelerating from FY 73 to FY 72 the program to provide the equipment needed for a 1.1 million force level. We can also activate units that were not scheduled to be activated until 1973. The RF and PF play a large role, especially in protracted warfare. The GVN is reducing the strength of the PF platoon from 35 to 32 men, and the space savings will result in 200 additional platoons. I think that the redistribution of forces has also already been discussed here.

Dr. Kissinger: It's essential in any event that the forces in MRs 1 and 2 be strengthened.

Gen. St. John: That's right. A permanent redistribution of forces involves many problems. One way to shift forces is to move the general reserves, which consist of marines, airborne troops, and rangers. Another way to do it is to cut down some of the units in MRs 3 and 4, where we have a surplus, and put additional units in regions 1 and 2. Still another way is to form an additional division out of the 1st ARVN Division. This would, however, not be a total additional division. A second possibility, as discussed on Page 30, would be to form units from the Kontum area into 2 or 3 regiments, with combat support elements. Regarding expansion possibilities, the RVNAF could go to 1.2 million men, or some lesser order of magnitude. It's debatable whether the manpower is available to do this. In any case, the major constraint against doing this would be the lack of leadership rather than the lack of manpower. We think that some redistribution of strength to MRs 1 and 2 is necessary. It's important and desirable to get the GVN to go along with this.

Mr. Helms: Is there any way we can speed up strengthening the RVNAF?

Gen. St. John: We're accelerating as fast as we can. The GVN should reach the 1.1 million force level in 1972.

Mr. Carver: The problem with this type of analysis [the analysis in the June 7 summary paper] is that redeployment is the quick and easy answer. We will have a problem with some of the ARVN force who do not want to be redeployed from MR 3 to MR 1. We should be able to get by in MR 1 by jacking up the forces and men already deployed there.

Gen. St. John: That's the thrust of what we're proposing. We want to move spaces, not necessarily men. In MR 2 we're faced with the same quantitative problem.

Dr. Kissinger: We have seven months to go.

Mr. Packard: We can recommend several courses of action. There are two or three decisions we ought to make. (1) Do we all agree something has to be done in MRs 1 and 2? (2) Should we raise the RVNAF to 1.2 million men or leave it at 1.1 million? I personally think we should stabilize it at 1.1 million and concentrate on raising quality and manning levels. (3) Should we work to get stronger RVNAF leadership and other things Gen. St. John mentioned? This, I think, is the least that needs to be done. That leaves two other issues to which we should address ourselves: One is close air support. We will have some recommendations on this later in the month. The other is the ROK forces.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Sullivan) You owe us the ROK paper. It was due May 28.

Mr. Sullivan: We have the paper, but it hasn't been signed by the Secretary. We have agreement within the Department and from Defense. If you wish, I can give it to you.¹²

Dr. Kissinger: What does the paper recommend?

Mr. Sullivan: We have several options. However, the consensus is that the Marine Brigade should go home. The two divisions should stay through CY 1972. We should agree to fund the two divisions up to January 1, 1973, but we shouldn't pay more than we're paying now. In 1973, if necessary, we should negotiate a new arrangement with the Koreans. We also will have to tell the Koreans about our plans for withdrawals from Korea in 1973.

Dr. Kissinger: Will the paper be coming over in a day or so?

Mr. Sullivan: Yes.

Adm. Moorer: We must talk with the Koreans about this.

Mr. Packard: We ought to have a decision before the Secretary leaves.

Dr. Kissinger: Which Secretary? There are so many of them traveling these days.

Mr. Packard: Laird.

Mr. Mitchell: (to Mr. Packard) What have you proposed to do about moving RVN forces?

Mr. Packard: We think we should leave that to Gen. Abrams.

¹² Rogers forwarded the paper to Nixon under a June 17 covering memorandum and Kissinger issued NSDM 113 on June 23, ordering U.S. support of two ROK divisions in South Vietnam through CY 1972, a review of the situation after the 1971–1972 dry season, three-way negotiations on support costs, no increase in U.S. support over FY 1972 estimates, discussions with the ROK to improve its combat performance, and no linkage between ROK force levels in Vietnam and possible U.S. redeployments from the ROK. See *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972, Document 95, footnote 2, and Document 96.

Adm. Moorer: I don't think we will have a serious problem moving them from MR to MR. Right now it takes 38 hours to move a division from MR 3 to MR 1. We will have 96 C-130s in Vietnam through 1972, and I think we're relatively well taken care of in this respect. It's an entirely different matter for helicopters used in assault operations. The ARVN will add 120, but we will go down from 940 to 300—mostly UH-1s. There are two problems: (1) going from one region to another and (2) tactical mobility. The first is not too difficult. The helicopter problem should be looked at closely. John, does that handle the first part of your question?

Mr. Mitchell: I take it there's no constraint on taking forces out of MRs 3 and 4.

Dr. Kissinger: There is a time factor. If their forces are out of there very long, it gives the other side incentive to raise hell there.

(to Mr. Packard) Can you give us a paper in ten days? Give us your judgment on what is needed; relate the program to the need. We have to know whether the additional forces needed in MRs 1 and 2 should come out of MR 3 and or whether we should create and put in new units. I have no judgment on how to do this. The usual advice we get is that we shouldn't move units because they would lose their effectiveness. We need this study by the end of next week so that the President can make a decision. That way we can have a program that can be carried out by the end of the year. I think the general ideas you have developed are good. We will be able to move with confidence.

Mr. Packard: We should just keep moving and not talk about it so much.

217. Conversation Among President Nixon, his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and the White House Chief of Staff (Haldeman)¹

Washington, June 11, 1971.

Kissinger: You know, one of the problems with the—that the Vietnamese have is if they give us anything at all in Paris, even if it leads to another stalemate, if we could get any movement at all—

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 517-4. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. The transcript is part of a larger conversation, 9:37-10:36 a.m.

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —that looks like a serious negotiation—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —that would be a tremendous shot for public opinion.

Nixon: [chuckles] Yeah, you mean if they did it publicly.

Kissinger: So, that's—that's the tough problem they're up against for June 26th.²

Nixon: [unclear] They know. They must know that—

Kissinger: Now, they are—I have had an analysis made, and I'll send it in to you—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —taking the Xuan Thuy interview³ as against what I said to them—

Nixon: Um-hmm?

Kissinger: —and they are obviously talking to us in their crooked way—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: I mean, this idea, for example, of separating military and political issues—which no one here in town will understand because—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —they don't know what we've said to them, but that's all through that interview. I've got the full text now. Not in an acceptable way, but the mere fact that they're talking about it is, is interesting. But it may not—this is just a bitter pill for them to swallow; they may not be ready to do it. And then they're pushing their infiltration very hard, even in the rainy season—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: But, that could mean two things. That could mean that they're in desperate shape, too.

Nixon: Then we hit 'em.

[unclear]

² Kissinger was to meet the North Vietnamese in Paris on June 26. See Document 223.

³ According to Chalmers Roberts: "The top North Vietnamese representative at the Paris peace talks said today [June 8] that the prisoner of war issue, properly coupled with a total American withdrawal, could be settled while the Thieu-Ky regime is still in power in Saigon, but indicated that Hanoi will not agree if the United States intends to continue to arm and support the South Vietnamese forces." See "N. Viets Demand Aid End: Thuy Outlines Requisites for POW Talks," *The Washington Post*, June 9, 1971, p. A1.

Kissinger: At the middle of the week, it's always tough to tell, but it's—I would say it's certainly not above 30—⁴

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —and it's more likely to be at the low 20s.

Nixon: Where we were before?

Kissinger: Yeah, it's—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: There's no significant difference from last week. But you can never tell whether there's one helicopter down, or whether some people died in a hospital—

Nixon: Yeah, that's right.

Haldeman: Because we've brought them down to such low numbers that each [unclear].

Nixon: Yeah, yeah, yeah. [unclear] My God, before if you shot down a helicopter and lost 19, it wouldn't make any difference.

Haldeman: Well—

Nixon: Nineteen in relation to 120 is nothing.

Kissinger: But—

Nixon: Nineteen in relation to 19 doubles it.

Haldeman: Doubles it.

Kissinger: But, if you look, for example, at the month, if it hadn't been for these 33—

Nixon: Um-hmm?

Kissinger: —we would have had below 25 every week—

Nixon: Yeah. I sure want them to—I sure want to get some sort of work done. I mean, get the—Scali to get out the—play the casualty line. And, it's that what we said has happened. We said it would go down after Cambodia. It did. We said it would go down after Laos. It did. Now, just keep pointing. In other words—

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: —it's a good point do, to go.

⁴ This discussion is about the declining weekly number of military personnel who lost their lives in theater.

218. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, June 12, 1971.

Kissinger: Mr. President, Le Duc Tho is on the way west, stopping in Peking and Moscow.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: He's allegedly going to the East German Party Congress. You can bet your bottom dollar he'll be in . . .

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: He's not at the meetings. He's stopping in Peking and Paris—and Moscow.

[9 seconds not declassified]

Nixon: Hmm?

Kissinger: This is as close as—Le Duc Tho never shows up. They may say no, Mr. President.

Nixon: You think he'll show up at your conference?

Kissinger: Certainly. Almost certainly. Eighty percent. If not, he'll show up there to give them instructions.

Nixon: Well, it's very good that he's going to Peking.

Kissinger: But he is going through Peking and Moscow. [unclear] Le Duc Tho is the third man in the hierarchy there, the only man who can take independent decisions on negotiations. He travels only when there are crucial matters. He was there for the bombing halt, and he was there for the—

Nixon: Was he there for the bombing halt?

Kissinger: Yeah. He was there for the early discussions with—until the fall of Sihanouk, and then he left. You remember those meetings we had in the spring of—

Nixon: Oh, yeah.

Kissinger: —of 6—of '70.²

Nixon: Oh, yeah. He was there, yeah.

Kissinger: And he is formidable.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 518–3. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. The exchange is part of a larger conversation, 10:32–11:11 a.m.

² Kissinger met with Le Duc Tho in Paris on February 21, March 16, and April 4, 1970. (See *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume V, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Documents 185, 189, 190, 191, 201, 218, 222, and 223)

Nixon: Yeah. I was reading a news summary, and just thinking of the public that we have. As you say, Johnson's was nothing compared to this. 'Cause Christ Almighty, at least he didn't have it from within his administration.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: You know what I mean? While Gardner left, he never said anything. He was nobody. He was the Secretary of HEW.³ My God, we've got, as you know—But, the way these people are rushing around with this Clifford thing is unbelievable.

Kissinger: Yeah. But, I actually think that Clifford—⁴

Nixon: You don't think he's getting through?

Kissinger: No, Mr. President. I really believe that—

Nixon: What's he up to? Is he trying to fork—trying to re-circuit the wires? Is that it?

Kissinger: Yeah, but Mr. President, the North Vietnamese, with Le Duc Tho on the move, sure, they're trying to—

Nixon: Um-hmm?

Kissinger: —to draw blood, and they're trying to see whether they can trigger us into—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —into making concessions before he gets there.

Nixon: There ain't going to be any.

Kissinger: He does not have anything. I will bet my bottom dollar on it that he has nothing of any significance. He may have some Delphic hints by some low-level guy.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: It doesn't—they don't do business that way.

Nixon: The probability that they're trying to do—if they are going to do something, that they don't—they wanted to do it through somebody else. In other words, not let us do it. And there's always that possibility, Henry.

Kissinger: There's always that slight possibility, Mr. President. But, even then, we're not in a bad position, because we can say on May 31st we made this proposal.⁵ And, I mean, we've got him outflanked. That if they're screwing us—

Nixon: Um-hmm?

³ John Gardner, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, August 1965 to January 1968 resigned because of his opposition to the war.

⁴ See footnote 2, Document 217.

⁵ See Document 207.

Kissinger: —you can say that. Whenever you decide you can—whenever you decide that this thing isn't getting anywhere—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —you can decide on May 31st, on the highest level, we made this proposal. While it was under consideration in Hanoi, we were forced into—Clifford came in with his variation of it. And, you can use it either as—in—as an example of independent negotiation by Clifford, or as an example of, of Hanoi's treachery.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: I—I think we've got them outmaneuvered, but my impression is that the press—I saw Henry Hubbard and [Jerold] Schecter⁶ yesterday, and I took a very tough line. I said—I reminded them that on March 25th, after Laos, when they were all sneering at us, on the patio of my office in San Clemente, I expressed your conviction and my conviction that this—there might be negotiations this year. And that, at that time, everyone was saying negotiations were senseless; all that's left to do is to get out. I said to them, "Do you people really believe that we're missing a bet? Do you really believe we don't look into all these things? If you do—" I said, "I admit it. We won't give you any facts. We won't confirm or deny anything. And if you write that we're missing them, it even helps what we are trying to do. So, you just go ahead and write it. I am not going to negotiate publicly with, with them—with them." They were really shaken. They didn't know what to do. Because, on the one hand, they had this—I mean, after all, it isn't plausible, that we, who—no one has talked more about negotiations than you, or I in my backgrounders, here. This is not a Johnson phenomenon.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: And I don't think they're going to—they haven't hit us in the press very hard. In fact, they haven't hit us at all. Even *The Washington Post* had a very ambiguous editorial, yesterday, which for [them] it was really quite moderate.⁷ They said both are wrong; both Clifford and we. Well, that's pretty good for them.

Nixon: Why'd they say Clifford was wrong?

Kissinger: Well, because he was implying that there was a solution without giving it, and we were wrong by refusing to recognize that there may be movement. Hell, if there's movement, we produced it. We will be able to show that this break of Xuan Thuy about Thieu was a direct outgrowth—you remember, I spotted it before they even

⁶ Hubbard was White House correspondent for *Newsweek* and Schecter White House correspondent for *Time* magazine.

⁷ The editorial was entitled "Promise on Vietnam?" (June 11, 1971, p. A24)

saw it, and told you that this is an answer to what we said to them on May 31st. I really think we have, we have a fighting chance, now, for a serious negotiation this summer. Le Duc Tho wouldn't be there unless they really wanted to look it over. He may say, "No," as he did in March—

Nixon: Suppose it does start to open up: what do you do? Then you put it in the Bruce channel?

Kissinger: Well, then, we have to decide how to do it, Mr. President. Whether—I really believe—

Nixon: You just can't keep running over there.

Kissinger: No, no. I can't do it. That's—

Nixon: Why? We can't do it without a—who could do it if we, if we—

Kissinger: Well, I've worked out—

Nixon: —dispose of it? But, we've got to have something. You—we, we can't just continue to do this, you know?

Kissinger: No, no. No, the choice we have to make is— Incidentally, I've worked out a way, now, by which I can get over there with great safety. The British have a courier plane that lands at an RAF base, and they will take me anytime I want to go, so we don't have to use American planes.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: And they are absolutely secure. [unclear] I might have to go once more—or at most, twice more—to do it, to get it done. The question we have to decide is whether we should let Bruce surface it, or whether we should get you to write a letter? My strong instinct is, Mr. President, that if they—

Nixon: I'd better do it.

Kissinger: That you do it. This is what I meant. That's the decision we have to make—

Nixon: [unclear] Hell, we could let Bruce do it. [unclear] both Laird and Rogers would be in saying, "Hey, great."

Kissinger: Well, that's why I think, Mr. President, that, as soon as we know a serious negotiation is starting, you have to get out in front and break the deadlock. Or—or make something that breaks—do something that breaks the deadlock. And that can be easily arranged.

Nixon: We can arrange that.

Kissinger: I think that's better than just letting it trickle out in Paris.

Nixon: Work on it a bit, how long these general principles [unclear]—

Kissinger: I think, Mr. President, that if there is going to be an agreement, and there—

Nixon: It'll come quickly.

Kissinger: It will come this summer. That's the funny thing.

Nixon: That's always the theory you've had. Is it—?

Kissinger: Well, I've always had the theory, but I think the Vietnamese elections are helping us that way.

Nixon: What's your view of the Big Minh–Ky deal I noticed in the paper this morning?⁸

Kissinger: They actually made it?

Nixon: Well, it said that they had made a deal. I don't know, maybe see if it's true.

Kissinger: Well, my view of the—

Nixon: It's just as well; put 'em over there. But I want them to really ride hard on those bastards and let them know they aren't going to get anything.

Kissinger: Well, my view of the Big Minh–Ky deal is that it gives the opposition to Thieu a viable combination—

Nixon: Hmm.

Kissinger: —but that Thieu will, almost certainly, will win.

Nixon: Well, suppose they won? There's not much difference, would it?

Kissinger: Mr. President—

Nixon: They, they live at our sufferance, anyway. They'd have to come along. They'd have to.

Kissinger: If—Ky is actually a friend of ours. Ky behaved with great dignity—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: —on the occasion that I saw him to turn off his trip, yeah—

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: Uh—

Nixon: Big Minh is just dumb.

Kissinger: Big Minh is just a front man.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: And—so, I—I would think that if we get our deal, and if then Thieu is defeated in the election, so be it. It's the major thing. But, I don't think that will happen. If it does happen—

⁸ "Ky, Minh Ally for Viet Vote," *The Washington Post*, June 12, 1971, p. A1.

Nixon: Um-hmm? What is your [unclear]. What's your—any judgment on the, the Cambodian action? I noticed they were trying to build that up now, at least at the present time.

Kissinger: Well, uh—

Nixon: How significant is it?

Kissinger: Well, it's significant in the sense—

Nixon: Not as significant as the press obviously feels about it?

Kissinger: No, but it's significant in the sense that this damned—that the death of Tri obviously kept us from knocking them out in that area. And that may have been the worst loss, because we did gain in Lam Son 719—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —60 to 80 percent of what we wanted, but after Tri's death—as I told you then—that Cambodian operation just petered out. I don't think they're going to topple the situation there. What they're trying to do is to create—reconstitute the sanctuaries based on a northern supply route this time.

Nixon: Um-hmm. Well, that's enough.

Kissinger: And that's—that, I think, they're in the process of. But, another problem, of course, is—another—one reason for it is that Thieu is economizing his forces now, because of the election.

Nixon: Not trying to have too many casualties?

Kissinger: No.

[Omitted here is discussion of the Middle East and the PRC, portions of which are printed in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIII, Soviet Union, October 1970–October 1971, Document 256.]

Nixon: Getting back to this Clifford/Gardner, et cetera. I noticed Gardner was on—

Kissinger: Yeah, I saw that.

Nixon: —against our fellow [unclear]. But anyway, [unclear] miserable prick, isn't he?

Kissinger: Gardner—

Nixon: Right?

Kissinger: —he is as petty—

Nixon: [unclear] He's not an admirable person.

Kissinger: He's an effeminate—I mean, after all, he does not know a goddamn thing about Vietnam.

Nixon: Or about anything else.

Kissinger: Uh—

Nixon: I mean, about anything else in foreign policy.

Kissinger: At least education he's given some thought to, but—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —for him to say he—that you might still be there ten years from now, that is so—I told these guys yesterday from the press—

Nixon: Jesus Christ.

Kissinger: I said, “We’ve withdrawn steadily for two years. We’ve never lowered the withdrawal rate. We’ve never stopped withdrawing. What do you really think?”

Nixon: Well, that’s what I told [Senator John Sherman] Cooper. I said, “Now, John, you know damn well what the situation’s going to be next year, don’t you?” And I says, “You’re—you goddamn—you’re our opponents, now. Maybe you’d want to get on board? And you—” That’s it, Henry. They know damn well where we are.

Kissinger: But I see now, Mr. President, why—

Nixon: Hmm?

Kissinger: —Le Duc—why they couldn’t come to the meeting: because there’s the East—on the 20, or the 13th, or the 20th—because there’s the East German Party Congress from the 14th to the 21st. Xuan Thu undoubtedly will be there to talk to Le Duc Tho. And—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —so, the 26th is the earliest they could possibly be there.

Nixon: In terms of reaction to this Cambodian thing, is there—are we doing adequately there? Part of the problem with Laird is holding back on the—

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: —airstrikes?

Kissinger: —not—no, the real problem is that MACV is just not on top of its job. That, either because Laird has a private deal with Abrams, or because Abrams has just quit, they’re not making their extra special effort, Mr. President, that makes the difference between success and failure. I think that, that is the—that is one of the major problems.

Nixon: Just sitting out there like the French used to sit.

Kissinger: And—

Nixon: [unclear] Goddammit, we just need a general. I agree with you: we’ll take that little DePuy.⁹ He’s a cocky little bastard and let him go out there and to shape them up.

Kissinger: I think that is one of the big problems: that we’re just not—

⁹ Lieutenant General William E. DePuy, Assistant Vice Chief of Staff of the Army.

Nixon: We'll be—it'll be easy after the next announcement to bring Abrams home.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: I mean, just say, "We're finished there." Hand DePuy with what we have left. That there's been no deal, and tell him don't worry, he'll—he'll be looking for our opportunities to smack 'em.

Kissinger: I just have an instinct that we—I don't know whether they'll make it, but this is as close as we've ever been. It's less—it's still far. It's at best one in three, Mr. President. I don't want to—

Nixon: I know. I know.

Kissinger: —to mislead you, but—

Nixon: Don't worry, I'm not. I'm not being hopeful, but, nevertheless, there's a chance.

Kissinger: There is a chance.

Nixon: And there has never been before. So, we'll see. Hell, these, these people will—you can be sure, too, that every stinking political fellow like Clifford will try to get in on that chance. You realize what this would do to them politically?

Kissinger: They'd be dead.

Nixon: If we pull off the negotiations, they'd be absolutely dead.

Kissinger: If we are ruthless enough.

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: If we don't let them get off the hook, again.

Nixon: [unclear] off the hook—I'd never. On this one, we're not going to bring them in on it, we're not going to [unclear].

Kissinger: Because that's the mistake we made after October 7th.¹⁰

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: Now that I look back, I was part of the mistake—

Nixon: I think we shouldn't have even made the speech.

Kissinger: We shouldn't have made the speech, but instead then of wallowing in their approbation—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —we should have reminded the country that these were the guys who were rioting against us.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: Who were encouraging them and against whose opposition we got to that, that point.

¹⁰ Reference is to the speech Nixon made on October 7, 1970. See Document 46.

219. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)¹

Washington, June 15, 1971.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

P: With regard to Thieu meeting. I am wondering myself if it's in his interest. We are not frozen on that and doing it for him. Before we _____ which would be for us. A meeting might—

H: It won't get anything on that issue.

P: Problem of drugs² and everything being pinpointed and aid—

H: Only if something comes from Henry's exercise and we don't want it in that forum.

P: His interest might not be in this when he is ahead. My political advice would be not to have too much Americans around him.

H: If Henry gets a favorable response we could talk with Thieu over there.

P: Is Henry planning to go with Agnew?

H: A little before and get started. He isn't certain yet. He is still wrestling with the best schedule.

P: One way we might do it—go there and let it be in lieu—no problem with a statement. It will mean a lot to Thieu.

H: To have the President's man.

P: Confidential talks. As for Rogers, he will understand that.

H: We will have that problem in any event. Especially if it's a substitute for the other. He is concerned about other.

P: And since nothing will be said we will get no publicity.

H: Make a good case that it's the better way. Only problem would be if something broke.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 998, Haig Chronological Files, Haig Telcons 1971 (2 of 2). No classification marking. All omissions are in the original.

² Bunker and Abrams met with Thieu on May 3 to discuss narcotics and smuggling. As a result of their discussion, Bunker called for the following measures: establish a team of five senior and interministerial committees to develop a program; revise airport customs procedures and training and make personnel changes; reorganize the narcotics section of the National Police; restrict drug sales at pharmacies and limit access of U.S. troops; and undertake a nationwide publicity campaign. Bunker made Berger the principal contact to the GVN on these issues. (*The Bunker Papers, Reports to the President From Vietnam, 1967–1973*, pp. 838–846)

P: We will get Bunker in soon and talk to him about this.³ You tell Henry we should consider whether our interests are served by rushing it over there. Turn it around on the ground. Thieu play his game and not hypo it at home. Flap on who got _____. I think the situation is difficult on both sides as far as the meeting is concerned. I think Laird gave it away. The problem is our going over there and coming out and saying nothing even what we say on ground combat will not go as far as Laird and Rogers go and it will appear that Thieu talked us out of it.

H: Only useful to say that _____. If we turn it down we should think about it.

P: That's the problem. You will not get it that flat. In any event I think we should hold that—strong reconsideration. Don't tell Rogers and let him think we are going ahead.

³ See Document 220.

220. Conversation Among President Nixon, the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker), and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, June 16, 1971.

Nixon: Well, now, let me—let's come down to our problems. As Henry discussed with you the—

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: —the July thing.

Bunker: Yes.

Nixon: You can see the problem—

Bunker: I do, yes.

Nixon: —with the—I do not see anything that would be gained, certainly here.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 522-2. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. The exchange is part of a larger conversation, 10:39 a.m.–12:07 p.m. According to the Nixon tapes log, Kissinger entered at 11:21 a.m. and Bunker at 11:32 a.m.

Bunker: Yes.

Nixon: And my guess is, I don't know there would be, would be gained much, there, at this point—

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: —to have a meeting,² but—and, I thought that in lieu of that, that if—that if it is in lieu of it in a public sense, if it is in lieu of it—if it's in terms of its [unclear]. Henry wants to take this out, take a fact finding trip out to that part of the world, anyway—

Bunker: Yes. Yeah.

Nixon: And he could come and then he could sit down and talk candidly about our aid program—

Bunker: Yes, yes.

Nixon: —and all the rest, as to—

Bunker: Yes.

Nixon: And on a very private basis.

Bunker: Exactly.

Nixon: But our—but the real problem is that if we, if we escalate, if we rush over there right now with all of the talk about, you know, this. What do you think of these—this *New York Times* thing?³

[Omitted here is conversation related to the release of the Pentagon Papers.]

Nixon: But coming back to the options thing, now—

[unclear exchange]

Kissinger: Well, the problem with Defense is—Ellsworth and I have been talking about this. We believe—almost everybody except the civilians in Defense believes—that the ARVN improvement packages have to be strengthened. They have a vested interest in their packages, and they've been resisting this idea. I talked to you about this, Mr. President. Because, they, for example, want to pull out all American helicopters by next year.

[Omitted here is further discussion of Vietnam and of the President's schedule.]

² In a June 15 briefing memorandum to Nixon for the meeting, Kissinger advised him to ask Bunker to gauge Thieu's possible reaction if he canceled the Midway meeting. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 155, Vietnam Country Files, Viet June 71) At various times during the first half of the year, the date of the proposed meeting had slipped from early to late June and then to early July.

³ On June 13, *The New York Times* broke the Pentagon Papers story about the existence of the multi-volume classified history entitled *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945–1967* that then Secretary of Defense McNamara had commissioned. Over the next several weeks the *Times* published scores of stories about the Papers as well as excerpts from various volumes.

Nixon: Our goal is clear: our goal, now, is that, as we come to the—near the end of this long road is to succeed. We can succeed. You agree?

Bunker: Yes.

Nixon: Well, now, we can.

Bunker: Yes.

Nixon: We can, but, on the other hand, we must not give our enemies—and I'm not referring to our enemies in North Vietnam, but our enemies in this country—we cannot give them the weapons to kill us with. Now—

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: —I think that—I think—I think, for example, any meeting with Thieu, by me, at this point—that's why I was trying—

Bunker: Yes.

Nixon: —to get it June 8th, that early—

Bunker: Yes.

Nixon: —though we've had that washed out. But, any meeting, at this point, will—it'd be inevitably hyped into a blatant attempt on our part to strengthen his political position—

Bunker: I agree. I agree.

Nixon: That will hurt him here.

Bunker: Yes.

Nixon: It also could hurt him there.

Bunker: It could hurt him in there, too.

Nixon: Now, I—I think he must be really—he must be told that in substitution for that, he will have our—he's had as much support as he has, and God knows, nobody's given him support as we have.

Bunker: Certainly not.

Nixon: Second, that Henry's going to come out and look the thing over. Now—

Bunker: Yes.

Nixon: —can you sell that to him?

Bunker: I think so. Yes, sir. I will. He—I think, yes. I think that he'll—

Nixon: You can tell him that you've—

Bunker: He said [unclear]—

Nixon: —looked over American public opinion—

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: —and you've looked over the Senate.

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: And that, right now, the best thing is to let it ride through the Senate.

Bunker: I think—

Kissinger: Because it's all over the front pages.

Bunker: You know, I think in the interest of the elections there, if this took place, Minh, for example, might use this as an excuse just to pull out, you know? And, as I've said to Thieu, "You can't run alone. [chuckles] You can't run for office alone. You've got to have some other competitors, and Minh is just that sort of fellow." I'm afraid he'll pull out, anyway, at the end.

Nixon: Is Ky running with Minh now, or not?

Bunker: No. Ky's running separately, independently.

Nixon: Yeah.

Bunker: And, I have—

Nixon: So, Ky definitely is? Ky will get enough of the Deputies to be able to run?

Bunker: Oh, I think he'll get the provincial—I think he and—I think he and Minh have got a deal that Minh will work the Assembly, and Ky will work the counselors. And Minh will get—

Kissinger: Oh. Oh, so they don't take away from each other—

Bunker: They don't take it away from each other. I have a—

Nixon: Well—

Bunker: I have an interesting document I'd like to show you and Henry.

Nixon: Hang on.

Bunker: [5 seconds not declassified]

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Bunker: [24 seconds not declassified]

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Bunker: [3 seconds not declassified]

Nixon: Um-hmm?

Bunker: [16 seconds not declassified]

Nixon: [3 seconds not declassified]

Bunker: [2 seconds not declassified]

Nixon: Good.

Bunker: [2 seconds not declassified]

Kissinger: You were surprised by this?

Nixon: Oh, sure—

Bunker: [unclear]

Nixon: Just keep it—

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: —and we'll have to hope for the best.

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: Well, right now, he is ahead. He's very well-advised not to press it.

Bunker: Exactly.

Nixon: By the same token, I don't know what else could keep him ahead. Getting back to this problem that we had yesterday in the drug thing, as you can see, that is a—that is just an enormously potent issue.

Bunker: Oh, precisely—

Nixon: It's—Young—Milt Young⁴ has never voted against us on Vietnam, he's gonna vote against us on McGovern–Hatfield, solely because of drugs. Solely because of drugs.

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: He went back to Bismarck, South [*North*] Dakota and found out that people could buy shots for two dollars at Bien Hoa airport or Tan Son Nhut or some damn thing, and so he's gonna vote against [unclear]. And, of course, there're these stories about, well, the brother of the prime minister is involved; they don't know that the prime minister is not Thieu, it's somebody else. They think, "Well this is Thieu," and then—and so forth and everything. It has a—it smacks of everything that's wrong. What the hell is it? We all know that. The Turks have the same problem: their relatives are all in the business—the, the rest. But—but, I just can't emphasize too strongly that—

Bunker: Hmm?

Nixon: —that—I don't know. Maybe our own people just go in and shoot up those drug places. I don't know why, but we've got to get—and this hurts us. It has to be done, or we've got a massive investigation on our hands.

Bunker: Yes. He knows that, and I'll—

Nixon: Yeah. I know you talked to him. In your briefing, you put it into him. And I don't want to belabor the subject. You're keenly aware of it.

Bunker: Oh, yes.

Nixon: Just put it at the top of the agenda—

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: —and don't, don't—

Bunker: And Thieu is aware of it. He's [unclear].

Nixon: Don't give the press a chance to [unclear]. [laughs]

⁴ Senator Milton R. Young (R-ND).

Bunker: Yeah, yeah. And, it's a tremendous problem. You see, as I said on Monday, they were not users. I mean—

Nixon: No.

Bunker: —we brought it there and, and provided the market. And now, they're scared, worried it's going to spread to their own troops [unclear] and concerned that when we're out, if it has spread to their troops, when we pull out, that they're going to be in a real mess. So, let's see. This morning, this report came in that he'd put in this colonel. He told me he was going to put in a new Director-General for customs for South Vietnam, a big shake-up. So, we'll get at—keep at it, and keep the pressure on.

Nixon: Well, the—with regard to other problems, what do you see then at the present time? Is there anything that you want to—

Bunker: Well—

Nixon: —emphasize to Thieu—?

Bunker: President Thieu asked me, of course, to give you his regards, and as he said, which I've already reported, there are three things only that he's concerned about and had one to take up with me. One was immediate economic assistance, long-term economic assistance.

Nixon: Well, he has our assurance on that. And Kissinger, when he is there will reassure him.

Bunker: Yes. Now, the second thing—

Nixon: Why don't you put it on the basis that Kissinger—that's one of the points: that Kissinger is prepared—

Bunker: Yes. Fine—

Nixon: —to discuss substantively with him at that point.

Kissinger: That's right, and [unclear]—

Nixon: Speaking—and that he can speak with total authority.

Bunker: Good. The second thing, Mr. President was the acceleration of the ARVN improvement and modernization program. They've asked for some improved weapons. As a result, Thieu said what they learned in the Lam Son Operation, what the enemy had: they had longer-range artillery; they had bigger tanks; and they—these are things they want. And I think they want some more helicopters, probably. The—

Nixon: Hmm.

Bunker: The—Abrams and I talked to him a week ago and went over some of these things with him. Abrams told him, he said, "Well, it wouldn't have made a difference if you had bigger tanks because of the command problem [more] than your armor. The result would have been the same." Well that's true. But, as I said—

Nixon: Hmm.

Bunker: —they've got to fix up the command problem, but then when—if they do, they've still got—

Nixon: What if they got tanks—?

Bunker: —smaller tanks. [laughs]

Nixon: Listen, there can be no excuse about that, and Henry will be very forthcoming on that. Incidentally, I—I don't care what's out there. Leave it there. This business of just picking up a lot of stuff and hauling it home, it doesn't do anything except for bookkeeping. I didn't know they take it out to Arizona and let it rot and rust in the fields. Leave it in Vietnam. Let 'em sell it, put it on the black market, anything they want. Leave it in Vietnam if it'll help.

Bunker: Then the third thing, Mr. President, is assurance of continued air support. You see, on this basis, the—the—Thieu feels, and I think, we think, he's right, too—that Lam Son and our better air position has taken care of this year. When it comes to the dry season again in the fall, November, they'll begin to try to build up supplies—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Bunker: —for a push in the March–May period—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Bunker: —and again in the August–September period.

Nixon: Yeah.

Bunker: Around our elections. And we can't let anything go wrong next year before our elections here.

Nixon: Yeah.

Bunker: And, therefore, they'll need air support, because they can't. Their planes, what we've given them, are really not, not much good for interdiction. They're small jets that don't carry bombs. The one thing they complain about is that they can't carry enough bomb load; they have to go back and rearm so, so often that they lose time. But our interdiction has been improved tremendously this year. Last year—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Bunker: —the throughput was about 37 percent of the input. So far this year, because of Lam Son and the interdiction, it's been about 15.7 percent. It's been a vast improvement, and it's made a tremendous difference. And this is going to be a factor next year. And this is why both Abrams and I think Thieu is right about this; that he does need air support. And when Secretary Laird [unclear] he told us about the reduction in the budget proposal for air, for \$200 million this coming year, and \$500 million the next. Well, how, how that's going to affect us? I don't know, but I do think it's an important thing.

Nixon: Um-hmm. Um-hmm.

Bunker: I think those are the three. Those are—he says those are the only three points that he's concerned about—

Nixon: Well, now, on the air support, there's certainly no problem this year.

Bunker: No.

Nixon: I mean [unclear] in October—in November and December, and so forth and so on, I mean, just drop everything there is. The real problem we get driven down to, the budgetary problems, I suppose, is to what we're going to have left by August and September of next year. And also what the situation is.

Bunker: Well, he said it seems to be a question, then, of priorities. I mean, where they're shifting from something else to this.

Nixon: Hmm. What's your view on this, Henry?

Kissinger: My—

Nixon: Your—

Kissinger: My view is, first of all, we should force Defense to program full air support through next year, because if we don't, they'll just yank it out of there.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: Even if we don't use it.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: And, secondly, as long as we can keep the interdiction bombing going, they are in bad shape for launching a big offensive. If we started—I think after September next year, or, in fact, even earlier, that their supply effort for the August–September period is during the spring.

Bunker: Yeah.

Kissinger: So, we've got to keep it going through the spring in Laos, in southern Laos—

Nixon: Hmm.

Kissinger: —the northern part is, is less—

Nixon: It [unclear].

Kissinger: Because weather.

Bunker: Yeah. And I think [unclear]. I think we can't let anything go wrong before our elections next year.

Nixon: Yeah. Henry is right. As far as the air support is concerned, what really counts, insofar as their offensive in September, or August and September, it's got to be—you've got to knock 'em off in the spring [unclear].

Bunker: Yeah, that's right. Yeah.

Nixon: Well, we'll do that. We can commit to that.

Bunker: And they—

Nixon: They just have to do it.

Bunker: Yeah. The interdiction has been—it's been a tricky job this year. They've got some improved equipment, these new C-130 gunships—

Nixon: Yeah.

Bunker: —are doing a good job—

Nixon: You mean they are doing better?

Bunker: Oh, yeah. That's the main thing, Mr. President. The economic situation, I think, is, at present, it's better than I thought it would be, you know, with these—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Bunker: —reforms we've put in. Now, prices have only increased since the end of December about 2.8 percent.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Bunker: And in the last twelve months, only 8.2 percent, which is a pretty good, a pretty good record considering we used to think 30 percent a year was good. So, it's been—it's been done pretty well. Their Minister of Economy is here, now—

Nixon: Yeah.

Bunker: —who is first rate, the best man they've got in the Cabinet—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Bunker: —and Thieu has given extremely good backing. But, those are the main things. The—Thieu, as you know, has suggested—has said that observer groups would be welcome, and—

Nixon: Hmm?

Bunker: —I think—

Nixon: Then get [unclear]. Get on the offensive on that.

Kissinger: But we have a group. We have a—

Nixon: [unclear] get on the offensive [unclear].

Kissinger: Oh, yeah, we're putting one together.

Bunker: Are you?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Bunker: Good.

Nixon: Both sides? Democrats and Republicans?

Kissinger: [unclear]

Bunker: Fast.

Nixon: We've got to do it in order to—because, you know, some of these people are asking that a special committee be set up. Well,

let's—well, put one together, but put one together that's representative. Let them go out and look.

Bunker: As a matter of fact, Adlai Stevenson⁵ is coming to see me this afternoon.

Nixon: Well, he's wanted to put in a resolution—

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: —in that respect.

Kissinger: Of course, what he really wants is something that means he really—

Bunker: He wants to—he wants to monitor me.

Nixon: Yeah.

Bunker: Yes.

Nixon: Exactly.

Bunker: [unclear]

Nixon: Well, to see that the Americans do not play a role in it. Well, you just say we're not going to play any role.

Bunker: That's what I'll—I'll give him the—that's just something to put out to the Mission.

Nixon: Why, of course. We've got to keep it out of the Mission, and it's sensible [unclear]. He, then, will look at the past history and that he's on a bad wicket here.

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: Say, "You—you're welcome to come; we have nothing to hide."

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: But, let them—invite him as an individual to come. But put him on that committee, Henry. [unclear] Put him right on. In other words—what—who is on it, now? Who are they trying to—got any names?

Kissinger: I have, but I don't have the list here.

Nixon: But McGregor is getting together a list is he?

Kissinger: Yes.

Nixon: Understand: this should not be an in-house deal. It should be a—

Kissinger: No, no. It's bipartisan.

Nixon: A bipartisan group. Go out and look at the elections. Let's get it out. I'd like to have an announcement on that soon.

⁵ Senator Adlai E. Stevenson, III (D-IL).

Bunker: And we had two very—three good experts on it last time. We had Dick Scammon.⁶

Kissinger: Excellent.

Bunker: And we had Professor Herzberg from Rutgers, and Penniman from Georgetown.⁷ They were both—they were very good.

Nixon: Well, fine. Put them on—

Bunker: Scammon helped me out on the briefing questions.

Nixon: Scammon?

Bunker: Yes?

Nixon: Put him on.

Bunker: Right.

Nixon: But Scammon, of course, is a top Democrat, which helps, too—

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: —if Henry puts him on the thing. Look, those elections are more fair than most elections in most American cities. Now, let's face it.

Bunker: Yeah.

[unclear exchange]

Kissinger: Than any of the elections in Southeast Asia.

Nixon: Well—well, there are no—there are no fair elections in Southeast Asia, and there are no fair elections in Latin America. You know that.

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: Maybe Mexico.

Bunker: Well, Scammon—

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: Well, they can't—our Democratic critics can't question Scammon because he's their Bible on politics.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Well, let's take the offensive on that. Let's get that out right away. That it's—it's to knock off the Stevenson thing. We should see Stevenson, and—but point out that we welcome him. And I'd just disarm him. Say, "There's nothing to hide."

Bunker: Yeah. Yeah. Yes. Right.

⁶ Richard M. Scammon, political scientist, expert on public opinion, and election analyst, was an official United States observer of South Vietnam's 1967 Presidential election.

⁷ Political scientists Donald G. Herzberg and Howard R. Penniman had been United States observers of South Vietnam's 1967 Presidential election.

Nixon: The interesting thing is that the, that the—apparently, from what I hear, most everybody who goes to Vietnam comes back [unclear]. Dick Watson is a case in point. He says, “You know, I went there with great skepticism,” and he says to me, he says, “I’ve—anyways, I came back a convert.”

Bunker: Oh, yes. He had a breakdown there. He was—

Nixon: Yeah. But the point is—the point is that he’d been exposed to the French.

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: He came out there and saw what was going on. He says, “I came back, said they were all wrong.” Our real accomplishment is that, at this time, is that nobody, really, would have predicted that things would be going as well as they are now. Put it—yeah, you can talk all you want about Lam Son, but, how in the world, how in the world would casualties have been averaging 20, unless we’d done Lam Son, right?

Bunker: Sure.

Nixon: Nineteen last week, 23 this week, right?

Kissinger: Twenty-five this week.

Nixon: They’d have been 75, I mean—

Bunker: Oh, absolutely. I—Lam Son, you know, in spite of the press, was a good—a good operation, and some of the Vietnamese units did superb jobs: the First Division; the Marines; the Airborne. They did a tremendous job.

Kissinger: Well, actually, the Vietnamese units that bothered me are not the ones in Lam Son. I think they fought well. It’s the ones that have, that fought in Cambodia.

Bunker: Well, one division—

Nixon: I think that’s Tri’s.

Kissinger: Yeah. The one that fought in Snuol.

Bunker: Well, that’s the Fifth Division. Now—and this—Abrams and I have been a year trying to get that commander changed. And Thieu has agreed and agreed and agreed. Finally, six weeks before Snuol, Abe was off—was away a week in Thailand on a holiday, and Mike Davison sent in a memorandum [unclear] and said they had to really get this fellow out. I went to Thieu, and I said, “This is it. We’ve been talking about this for 9, 10 months. You’ve got to do it.” He said, “Yes, a top priority to finally get the right man.” Well, it took Snuol, finally, to get the job done. Now, he’s put in a—what Abrams said was the best regimental commander from the 21st Division, in the Delta, which was Minh’s old division, before he became [unclear]. But Minh is a good man. He’s—he’s all right.

Nixon: What is your—[clears throat] Of course, when you come back to this country—it must depress you when you see—

Bunker: Well, it sure does.

Nixon: But, out there, how do you feel?

Bunker: Oh, out there, I feel fine. Out there, I mean, I think things are going well, except for this damn drug business. But, I think that as far as the Vietnamization goes, I think things are going, going great. And now, the situation is stable, and I think things are moving. The campaign, I think, is going to be rough—

Nixon: Sure.

Bunker: —and—but, I think it's good. I think [unclear] if Ky and Minh do run, because I think Thieu will win, and I think that they have a chance to play for a big, open competition.

Nixon: Um-Hmm. Hmm.

Bunker: There's criticism, of course, of this endorsement provision, but the reason for it is entirely fair, in that we had eleven candidates last time.

221. Letter From Cambodian Prime Minister Lon Nol to President Nixon¹

Phnom Penh, June 19, 1971.

Mr. President:

Before I returned from Honolulu, you were good enough to mention, when you wished me a speedy recovery, that you shared my concern over the military and economic problems.

I thanked you sincerely for that touching message and especially expressed my appreciation for the medical care that had been lavished on me by eminent American doctors.

My health continues to improve, and so I am able to work more and more actively, and particularly to devote my efforts to adopting measures adequate to the defense of the country against the Viet Cong-North Vietnamese Communist aggressors. Speaking from this increas-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 749, Presidential Correspondence, 1969–1974, Cambodia: Prime Minister, Lon Nol (1971). Secret. Translation prepared by the Department of State.

ingly active position, I now take the liberty of discussing with you problems in two areas that I have particularly at heart:

National construction by means of general mobilization;
Designing the structure of the Khmer national armed forces to meet any eventuality, even peace.

On the first point, our national construction is organized around simple principles easily understood by my fellow countrymen in the cities and rural areas:

Democratically:
The Government helps
The people carry out
The technical experts assist

With these ideas in mind, we have promoted general mobilization with a view to having all the citizens' organizations contribute to the construction effort according to our general mobilization plan, which was communicated to you in my preceding letter.² With respect to this first point, this general mobilization is not aimed solely at defense, but is especially a war by organizations. This war by organizations is to cover gradually in this manner all aspects of our national construction process. Within this war by organizations, national construction should take on a form that we would prefer to be evolutionary in the sense of current progress, approaching a style similar to that of Israel, but which would also be typically Khmer.

I must point out, in this connection, that a Khmer delegation, composed of capable and active men, will soon go to Israel to learn on-the-spot about the methods used by that dynamic and courageous country in the various branches of its national construction, so that we may apply those methods to our own actions later.

We are well aware that the construction of a country at war involves all kinds of difficulties, engendered by the fact that we must fight everywhere, we must defend ourselves everywhere. However, we do not flinch before those difficulties.

In applying this construction policy and in conducting this war by organizations, we have assigned a prominent place to economic and social problems, and among these problems, we consider that feeding the population, providing relief to war refugees and victims, and providing jobs for the unemployed constitute the most urgent.

You yourself, Mr. President, have had the occasion to tell us of the interest with which you were following our efforts in these areas, as I

² Dated May 22. (Ibid.)

have already said. Therefore, please be good enough to have competent American experts and technicians help us carry out these projects and use your influence with countries that are friends of the United States to arouse their interest in our projects and persuade them to give us their cooperation and assistance in these matters also.

I wish to remind you at this point that the Khmer Republic intends to follow a policy of regionalization of Southeast Asia and of cooperation with all its Asian neighbors. This cooperation must be carried out with respect for democratic principles, and above all with freedom of conscience for all. So far as we are concerned, that is to say, between Khmers, one of the goals of this policy is to convert the Khmer into a well-rounded whole man—respectable, hard working and enjoying a satisfactory standard of living in accordance with the formula “democratic, hard-working, and a consumer.”

With respect to the military aspect, after hard combat for more than a year, we have been able, thanks to you, to halt the enemy advance, and that picture which was so somber in April–May 1970, is now becoming increasingly brighter.

The total strength of 220,000 men that you were good enough to agree to equip for us has been reached in actual facts. However, that figure includes wounded, disabled, and dead, the total number of which is about 15,000 men. For the time being, these cannot be omitted from the total strength, although they are no longer very active combatants.

The organization of our present troops was adopted after consultation with the commanding officer of the American Armed Forces in South Viet-Nam; furthermore, we have just reorganized the Ministry of National Defense and the General Staff of the Khmer Armed Forces so as to make the conduct of the war more efficient. This was also the thought of the United States representatives in South Viet-Nam.

As you know, that force of 220,000 men is intended for combat operations only to the south of the line passing through Oddor Méanchey–Siemréap–Kompong Thom–Kompong Thmar–North Kompong Cham–Krek towards the South Vietnamese border. But, for my part, I think that in the present, and especially in the future, combat situations, with possible Vietcong reinforcements coming either from South Viet-Nam or from Laos, that force could not cope fully with the enemy all the way to that line; we must note here that we have often been obliged to request the friendly South Vietnamese forces to intervene, particularly in the eastern and southern sectors of the country, which are sanctuary areas for the Vietcong and North Vietnamese.

In my letter of May 22, 1971 I stated my preoccupations and concerns about improving our military positions by recovering areas temporarily under enemy control; in the perspective of a general cease-fire

as a prelude to future negotiations, that is an absolute necessity. In order to attain that end, and also with a view to taking the initiative against the aggressors, it stands to reason that we are obliged to establish an additional force.

The first objective would be to reoccupy the region of the rubber plantations around Chamcar Andaung–Chup–Peamchéang–Krek–Mimot–Snuol, that is, the stand-fast zone where the Vietcong and North Vietnamese have established their principal sanctuaries and bases for launching their attacks against the Khmer Republic and the Republic of Viet-Nam. In order to reoccupy that zone, we would need an additional force of 50,000 men, which would bring the total of our forces to 270,000 men.

The next immediate objective would be a line to be established by us level with Kratié–Snuol. Later objectives would be the Stung Treng line, then the Labansiek RN 19 [National Highway 19]³ line, and, finally, the entire territory. I wish to specify that for our advance northward, I would proceed along the right bank of the Mekong, that is to say, approximately from Konpong Thmar towards Moeung Khong (Champasak).

Control of the area around Moeung Khong is also one of our objectives in order to prevent the Vietcong and North Vietnamese from using the Mekong.

In order to recapture all the rest of the areas occupied in the north and northeast of Cambodia, that is, Préah Vihear–Stung Treng–Rattanakiri–Kratié–Mondulkiri, another increase in forces of about 130,000 men would be needed. The 50,000 mentioned before plus 130,000, thus a total of 180,000 men.

To make this additional force of 180,000 men, thanks to your friendly assistance, I would again try to recruit 15,000 to 20,000 Khmer Krom men.

The National Khmer Armed Forces would then be a total force of 400,000 men.

With a force of that size, we believe we would be able to meet all contingencies, and, at the same time, relieve our South Vietnamese friends in the matter of the sanctuaries, and gain territory, without being surprised by the unforeseen contingencies and the hazards of the Peace Talks.

The realization of that program allows high hopes for a final happy outcome of our country's misfortunes. We must profit by and exploit the advantages won as soon as possible, especially since

³ Brackets are in the original.

other problems of a logistic and diplomatic nature could arise at any moment.

I am making an urgent appeal to you so that you may agree to help us to undertake, as soon as possible, that campaign to recover our territory occupied by the enemy. Recruiting and equipping a first supplementary force of 50,000 men should, with your usual kindness, be decided upon in the near future, that is, right now; the recruitment of the second group of 130,000 men could then be completely accomplished at the beginning of the next fiscal year.

I know, Mr. President, the noble feelings and the ideal which inspire you, your great country, and your people in your determination to help us to fight fiercely to defend our liberty, to survive, and to remain independent while preserving our territorial integrity. Through me, the entire Khmer people once again express their deepest gratitude to you.

As for myself personally, I again wish to say that I remember I am enjoying a more and more active life thanks to your hospital services in Hawaii, which I am constantly praising. I shall take advantage of the first possible opportunity to go to greet you personally and, at that time, fully express my appreciation to you.

Accept, Mr. President, the renewed assurance of my faithful friendship and my very high consideration.⁴

Lon Nol⁵

⁴ In telegram 143184 to Phnom Penh, August 6, the Department transmitted an aide-mémoire for Lon Nol, which informed him that his request for assistance to increase the FANK force level was problematic given the resources currently available for assistance and the economic conditions in Cambodia and recommended that the GKR demobilize unfit troops, instill stronger discipline, continue its reorganization efforts, and focus on consolidating its hold in the southern part of the country. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, DEF 6 CAMB) Swank reported in telegram 3882 from Phnom Penh, August 7, that even though Lon Nol was resigned to the fact that he would not get more support in FY 1972, he would likely raise the issue again. (Ibid.) On August 19, Nixon sent Lon Nol a reply in which he explained that “rather than attempting here to deal in detail with your proposals I am asking the Chargé d’Affaires in Phnom Penh to discuss these matters with you personally.” (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Presidential Correspondence, 1969–1974, Cambodia: Prime Minister, Lon Nol (1971))

⁵ Printed from a copy that indicates Lon Nol signed the original. Cambodian text.

222. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) and Senator Robert P. Griffin¹

Washington, June 22, 1971, 11:24 a.m.

G: I wanted to give you an up-to-date reading as I saw it on our situation.² We had a meeting with Clark McGregor and Timmons last night. I imagine you had a report on that and had Cooke and Stephens in to see if we can back them down. Couldn't do anything. They are confident they have the vote today and I think they may. It looks like a Mexican stand-off with 48–48 with 2 undecided. They are Jordan of Idaho and Talmadge. Miller has an amendment to it and he will vote for it. So it's that close. I don't know what we can do about it. The only hope on this Cooke/Stephens thing which we vote on at 4:00 is that some Democrats may have a hard time getting a reading or will vote against but they will vote for Mansfield.

K: What effectively does Cooke/Stephens say again?

G: Designated (?) to terminate all forces in Indochina as soon as possible and not to exceed 9 months. All military forces and equipment from SVN. Cut off of funds after 9 months after enactment.

K: How different from McGovern/Hatfield?

G: After 60 days if President cannot get firm commitment of NV of release of Prisoners then he reports and it becomes inoperative. I am not for it and not suggesting anyone should be.

K: These things—I wish I could—I am always the SOB. I have never seen anything like this. Last chance of negotiation and sit in Hanoi. If it were next Jan. what the hell, we are in an election time but now I can't tell you—I can't go with it. If they do it, they do it.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 10, Chronological File. No classification marking. The omission is in the original.

² Beginning in 1970, a series of Congressional amendments were sponsored that called, in some form, for the removal of U.S. forces from Southeast Asia and the stoppage of funding for the war: McGovern–Hatfield; Cooke–Stephens; and Cooper–Church. Between June 15 and June 22, Kissinger had several telephone conversations with Senators Pearson, Dole, Griffin, and Timmons on the Cooke–Stephens amendment. Transcripts of these conversations are *ibid.*

G: We have 3 in a row and each one is worse. If the Cooke/Stephens loses then we have Mansfield. Then Pastore has with a "Sense of the Senate."

K: I have seen it.

G: Withdraw by July 4, 1972. President urged to take steps to implement policies in Section A. Asks _____ to cooperate with the President and release all POWs of govt and forces allied with it. It does have the date of July 4. My guess is one will pass. We may not get to Pastore which is nothing but an expression.

K: So be it. I am violently opposed and these people are doing damage they don't know. Everyone who has cooperated in this will regret it. They have stabbed us in the back at the last moment.

G: We have a policy luncheon with all the Republicans at 12:30. Do you want someone come up and make a pitch on this. We will.

K: Who? Me?

G: It's a possibility. Maybe you want to send Rogers or Laird—I don't think he's the one. You might be. Check it out and see if someone shouldn't come. Our biggest problem with our own side. It's erosion.

K: I will talk here.³

³ At 7:04 p.m., Nixon and Kissinger spoke on the telephone and agreed that Ziegler should issue a statement that evening that "this amendment could seriously jeopardize our negotiating." (Ibid.)

223. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Paris, June 26, 1971, 10:45 a.m.–3:05 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Le Duc Tho, Adviser to the North Vietnamese Delegation
Xuan Thuy, Chief of North Vietnamese Delegation
Vo Van Sung, North Vietnamese Delegate General in Paris
Phan Hien² of North Vietnamese Delegation
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
Winston Lord, NSC Staff

Kissinger: I am sorry about the delay. We were held up in landing because the President of France was leaving at the same airport at which we arrived and there was a twenty-minute delay.

My presence here is known among Americans only to the President and to Ambassador Bruce in Paris. In France, it is known only to President Pompidou. I am in Britain for an official visit. They think I am in the countryside visiting friends for the day.

It is a great pleasure to see you again, Mr. Minister and to see my old friend, Mr. Special Adviser Le Duc Tho in Paris.³ I hope the fact that we are sitting at a table is a good omen.

Xuan Thuy: On our part, all the people present here are known to you.

We have studied your Seven Point Program.⁴ I have also informed Mr. Le Duc Tho of our exchange of views last time.

Before expressing our views on the Seven Point Program that the Special Adviser explained on behalf of President Nixon on May 31st, 1971, I would like to ask some questions for clarification.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1039, Files for the President, Vietnam Negotiations, HAK II 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting took place at the North Vietnamese Residence in Paris, 11 Rue Darthe. Kissinger summarized this meeting in a June 27 memorandum to the President. (Ibid., Box 853, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David, Vol. VIII)

² Nguyen Minh Vy's name was crossed out and Phan Hien's was written in.

³ In a June 21 memorandum to the President, Kissinger wrote that Le's presence "would be very significant, as Hanoi does not need to send him to say no to our proposal." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1039, Files for the President, Vietnam Negotiations, HAK II 1971)

⁴ See Document 207.

I am sure that Mr. Special Adviser is always prepared to answer my questions.

Kissinger: Someday when I am alone with the Special Adviser I will ask him to send a less tenacious negotiator.

Le Duc Tho: I think rather that I should send a more tenacious negotiator.

Xuan Thuy: I remember that in our previous meeting on March 16, 1970,⁵ the Special Adviser agreed that we should discuss military and political questions at the same time. But at the last meeting you did not mention political problems.

Therefore my question is, in what context shall we discuss political problems?

My second question, is that in your Seven Points, you mentioned about Vietnam but also about Indochina. Therefore it is not clear to me whether your intention is to discuss Vietnam or the whole of Indochina. If Indochina, it is also not clear how we should discuss it. You said that the Indochinese people should discuss the question of troop withdrawals. You also spoke of a ceasefire throughout Indochina.

Therefore, how should we discuss military and political questions regarding Indochina?

My third question is that in our meeting of August 4, 1969,⁶ Mr. Special Adviser raised the question of the neutrality of South Vietnam. You said the U.S. would agree to the neutrality of South Vietnam, but it was not then the time to discuss this. And now in your Seven Point Program you mention the neutrality of Laos and Cambodia, but you did not mention anything about the neutrality of South Vietnam. Therefore how should the question of neutrality be discussed?

My fourth question is that Mr. Special Adviser said that the United States would name the date for the withdrawal of U.S. and allied forces if our side agreed to settle the question of prisoners. At another point of your Seven Point Program you said the question of prisoners should be settled as part of the overall solution in the Seven Point Program.

I hope that you will give the answers to these questions.

Kissinger: Mr. Minister, these questions are asked with your usual perspicacity. Let me take them out of order.

Let me begin first with the last question, the issue of prisoners. Our view with how to proceed with fixing the date is as follows: if you

⁵ See *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume VI, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Document 201.

⁶ See *ibid.*, Document 106.

agree in principle with these proposals, that is all seven points, then we will give you the date and then of course we can discuss the date. The date concerns not only the prisoners, but the other five points also.

We understand, of course, that your agreement is conditional, and requires that the date is mutually acceptable.

Is that clear?

Xuan Thuy: That means the date is related to the whole Seven Points.

Kissinger: That is correct.

Xuan Thuy: I understand.

Kissinger: Now let me go to the second question of how we should discuss Indochina problems. We believe that there should be a ceasefire throughout Indochina, meaning of course cessation of all military activities by our side as well as your side throughout Indochina. This cessation of military activity of course also includes air activity on our side, except for reconnaissance.

We believe that there are three different problems with respect to Indochina:

The first is the ceasefire.

The second is the relationship between the political elements in each country.

The third is the international status of each country.

With respect to the ceasefire, we believe it should be discussed in the first instance between you and us, and that we should then recommend it to each of our allies in each of the three countries.

With respect to the political structure in each country, we believe it should be discussed by the parties concerned in each country.

With respect to the international status of each country, we are prepared to recognize and affirm the neutrality of each country, and that this can be established at an international conference.

But let me say that with respect to how to guarantee the neutrality of these countries, we are prepared to listen to your counter-proposal.

With respect to the international status of South Vietnam: as I pointed out to the Minister on August 4, we have no interest in maintaining a military alliance with South Vietnam. And we are prepared to discuss the nature of the military relationship as part of the general problem of withdrawing our forces.

Now I have left to last the most difficult problem: this is the political future of South Vietnam.

We are not children. We recognize that this is the issue which in many respects is most on your mind.

The problem, as it appears to us, is as follows. If we do not come to an agreement on the basis of these Seven Points, we will continue our present program of gradual withdrawal and gradual turning over of responsibilities to the South Vietnamese. I know that you do not believe that this will succeed, and I am not here to debate that point. The practical consequence will be that at some point we will lose the ability to influence the situation in South Vietnam, no matter whether we succeed or fail.

We have told you at many meetings that we are prepared to permit the political evolution of South Vietnam that reflects the political realities in South Vietnam. We are prepared to set a withdrawal date for our forces in order to speed the day at which this political evolution can be left to the South Vietnamese.

We believe this is the most realistic way of affecting the political process in South Vietnam, as the Minister also hinted in our last meeting in one comment he made about the elections this year in South Vietnam.

I know that the people of Vietnam have not maintained their independence during 2000 years by developing qualities of excess of confidence in foreigners. But I believe that the Minister and the Special Adviser are sufficiently acute students of the American scene to know that when we withdraw our forces it will not be in order to return to overturn the consequences.

These are the answers I have for the Minister's questions.

Xuan Thuy: Your answer regarding the political future of South Vietnam—I'm still unclear on this point. You said that you are prepared to fix a date to hasten the process of the determination of the future of South Vietnam through the South Vietnamese. When you mention the date, is that the date of a troop withdrawal or of elections in South Vietnam?

Kissinger: This is what I meant. There will be various stages. When you and we agree on a date for the withdrawal of U.S. forces, that in itself will create a new political reality in South Vietnam. When our forces are withdrawn, another new reality is created. From that day on the political future of South Vietnam will be essentially in the hands of the South Vietnamese.

Expressing a personal opinion, if we were to agree this summer on a program such as we have outlined, it may perhaps even have an influence on the South Vietnamese elections. But you are a better judge of this than we.

I'm trying to follow the instructions I received last year from Special Adviser Le Duc Tho about studying objective realities.

Le Duc Tho: These are not so objective.

Kissinger: Am I making any progress?

Le Duc Tho: Not an inch forward.

Kissinger: I have a very difficult professor.

Xuan Thuy: It is still unclear to me as to what you have said about the international status of South Vietnam in the framework of an overall settlement. You avoid speaking about the neutrality of South Vietnam. Is this lack related to the three points of Nguyen Van Thieu, who is opposed to Communism neutrality, and coalition?

Kissinger: No, we are prepared to discuss an agreed international status for South Vietnam.

Xuan Thuy: So it is true that this point is not mentioned in your Seven Point Program, but in the process of discussing these Seven Points we shall take up this question.

Kissinger: That is correct.

Xuan Thuy: I have another question.

The last time Mr. Special Adviser said the U.S. would fix a date for troop withdrawal when it knew about the release of POW's, but would not fix a date if it is not clear about prisoners. But from the answer today I understand that even if the U.S. gets the prisoners you would still not fix a date because a date still depends on your other points.

Kissinger: I made clear last time that the Seven Points are a package. One of these points is prisoners. Our proposal is that the withdrawal of prisoners occur simultaneously with the withdrawal of forces. Therefore in explaining point 7 to the Minister, I wanted to make clear that prisoners should be released, not just a discussion of this question. There must be agreement on their release, not just on discussion of it.

Let me make one explanation of the Seven Points: If you read them carefully, you will see that they are not all of the same character.

Point one fixes an obligation for us to give a date for the total withdrawal of all our forces.

Point two is really taken from your own program, namely that the disposition of other forces should be discussed among the peoples.

Point three requires a ceasefire.

Points four and five are really expositions of point three.

Point six establishes the principle of the neutrality of the Indochinese states and has been part of your program.

Point seven involves the release of POW's, and I have explained our thinking about this before.

So the essential principles are the withdrawal date, the ceasefire, neutrality, and the return of POW's.

Xuan Thuy: So, will you fix the date for your troop withdrawal if you know about the release of POW's?

Kissinger: If you agree that there shall be agreement on ceasefire, release of POW's, and a general agreement on neutrality, which you have already agreed to, we shall fix a date for withdrawal.

Xuan Thuy: What do you mean by international conference to guarantee the neutrality of the Indochinese states? Do you mean that the Paris conference will be extended to include Laos and Cambodia or do you mean another international conference?

Kissinger: I would like to point out to the Minister that he started out by posing four questions.

Xuan Thuy: These questions are in supplement to my four principal questions. I do not go out of the framework of the four questions. In the course of discussion I may develop them.

Kissinger: I regret to say that they are very good questions.

Mr. Minister, we are open minded on this point. We proposed on October 7⁷ a Geneva-type conference like 1954. However, we are willing to listen to other proposals on this.

We are prepared to do it either way, within the framework of other countries or by extending the present conference. On this we are concerned with the practical solution, rather than with a particular formality. We have not discussed this proposal with other potential participants in an international conference.

Xuan Thuy: Since you have limited the number of my questions to four, I will stop here. But since Special Adviser Le Duc Tho just came, I will give the floor to him.

If I have other questions, they will be within the framework of my four questions.

Kissinger: I'm sure that is a very flexible framework.

One good result of our previous discussion is that you have succeeded in inviting Special Adviser Le Duc Tho to be present here.

Xuan Thuy: I am glad too to have him here.

Le Duc Tho: After my coming here, I have read the minutes of the meetings between Xuan Thuy and the Special Adviser on May 31. Today I have just heard your answers to the questions put by Minister Xuan Thuy. Therefore I think it is clear to me about your intention.

But it is not yet completely clear. Because there are still many things which are still unclear. In spite of your answers, there are still points which are not concrete.

⁷ See Document 46.

May I say a few words?

Kissinger: I would be very grateful.

Le Duc Tho: This is the seventh time you are meeting with us.

Kissinger: Actually it is the eighth.

Le Duc Tho: We have reviewed the past meetings to draw conclusions about them. To see whether we have some hopes of settlement at this time.

The first time we met was in August of 1969. And in September you launched military operations against the Plain of Jars. The second meeting was between Minister Xuan Thuy and you in February 1970.⁸ This series of meetings included three meetings. And if you read the minutes again you would agree that at that time we were advancing towards substantive negotiations.

Kissinger: I agree.

Le Duc Tho: But you carried out the coup in Cambodia. You launched operations in Cambodia. As a result our talks were interrupted.

Kissinger: May I make one point, Mr. Special Adviser.

It really is important we understand each other on some historical points.

I agree with the Special Adviser that we were making progress in the spring of 1970. I can assure the Special Adviser, as I did then, although I know he does not believe me, that we had absolutely nothing to do with the overthrow of Prince Sihanouk.

Le Duc Tho: (laughs)

Kissinger: I know you do not believe it, but it's important for you to understand. It was an event that occurred within Cambodia that has cost both of us another one and a half years of conflict and suffering.

It is irrelevant now.

Le Duc Tho: I temporarily believe that you had nothing to do with the coup in Phnom Penh.

By the end of April 1970, you and the Saigon puppet sent up to one hundred thousand troops for the invasion of Cambodia. As a result of this, we opposed you. Not only us, but the people of the United States and of the world were opposed to these operations. And the authors were the U.S. and the Saigon puppets.

Kissinger: But the point I wanted to make, for the future not for the past, is this: I told Mr. Special Adviser and the Minister in April

⁸ See *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume VI, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Documents 189 and 190.

1970⁹ that we were prepared to guarantee the neutrality of Cambodia. You said that your concept of neutrality was different from ours. I believe if we had then taken the opportunity, we would have found a solution and would have avoided another year of war.

Le Duc Tho: I have not forgotten that at that time Minister Xuan Thuy and I were talking with you. In our minds, we were making progress at that time. I believe that if we had continued those talks we would have made progress. I no longer accuse you of the coup in Cambodia, because you do not admit it.

Kissinger: It is not true.

Le Duc Tho: I don't accuse but facts are facts. You launched military operations. How can we solve problems when there are military operations?

You say we should not talk of the past. But since you raised it, I must discuss it.

Minister Xuan Thuy met you again in September 1970.¹⁰ It was the third series. But in November you launched large-scale air attacks over North Vietnam, unprecedented since the cessation of bombing, and you sent commando troops to attack a place near Hanoi.

Early in 1971 we met once again. We did not meet, but we talked through Ambassador Dobrynin in the U.S. You proposed to Ambassador Dobrynin that we should meet.¹¹ You made a number of proposals. We gave the answer through Ambassador Dobrynin that we agreed to meet you and that the problems you raised should be discussed at a forthcoming meeting.¹² The meetings had not taken place, but in February you launched large-scale operations against Southern Laos, in Lam Son 719.

So I think each time we met you, with the intention of settling the problem, immediately afterwards either you launch military attacks against us or you use force against us.

Kissinger: May I tell the Special Adviser a factual thing.

I made certain suggestions to the Soviet Ambassador on January 9. I received the reply of the Soviet Ambassador only on February 23. And I was only told that you were in principle willing to meet but not what you were willing to discuss. That was over two weeks after the operations in Laos had started.

⁹ See *ibid.*, Document 222.

¹⁰ See Documents 34 and 35.

¹¹ See Document 101.

¹² Dobrynin and Kissinger met on February 22; see Document 133.

Le Duc Tho: We do not know the answer given to you by Ambassador Dobrynin, but we gave our reply before the operation in Laos. And we said that we shall discuss the proposal you wanted to make at the next meeting.

But I think that even if we had met before the operation, it would have taken place all the same.

Kissinger: I am not sure.

Le Duc Tho: The preparations for such large-scale operations cannot be made overnight. According to information available to us, Secretary Laird went to South Vietnam to discuss with Thieu the operation.¹³

Kissinger: I don't think it is appropriate for me to comment on this, except perhaps to draw the conclusion that we should not use intermediaries but should deal directly with each other.

Le Duc Tho: As far as we are concerned, we always have direct contact with you. But you first used an intermediary, Ambassador Dobrynin, so we had to give a reply through the Soviet Union. You used an intermediary, not we.

Kissinger: This proves that even a Harvard professor is not right 100 per cent of the time.

Le Duc Tho: This is the first time I hear you admit such a thing.

The reason I recall these past events is to show the experience we have.

I wonder what will follow our meetings this time. What do you intend to do? I wonder whether you are willing to settle the problems now? What are you up to?

Being an oppressed people, the victims of aggression, we fully understand imperialism. Over the past twenty-five years, we had the fate of having twice to cope with the U.S., and to sign agreements. Therefore we understand the U.S.

The articles published in the American papers on the documents of the Pentagon have revealed only part of the truth.¹⁴ We also understood Mr. Nixon when we fought the French. We understood Mr. Nixon came to Indochina, advocated sending troops to save the French, and advocated the use of nuclear weapons at Dienbienphu. Over the past two years, when Mr. Nixon succeeded to the White House, we have all the more clearly and deeply understood the Nixon Doctrine.

¹³ See footnote 3, Document 104.

¹⁴ See footnote 3, Document 220.

Since Mr. Nixon came to the White House, he has been talking a great deal about peace, but actually he has been making war with a very vicious strategy. Now you are talking once again on behalf of President Nixon and you tell me you are willing to negotiate, and not deceive us.

But from past experience we wonder whether you are really ready to settle the problem this time or if you want to continue the war. This is the point we are still worried about and still have doubt. Through your propaganda, it is not yet clear to us that you are willing to negotiate. Because your approach to the settlement of the Vietnam war is not yet correct.

The first thing and the important thing is that you want to separate the military question from the political problems, and you do not want to settle the political problems. But this is not a realistic proposal, a practical proposal. How can we dissociate the military problems from the political problems?

And, as Minister Xuan Thuy has just recalled, when we first met in 1970 you agreed with us that we should discuss the military and political problems at the same time.

There is no war without political goals. Military operations aim to achieve political goals. Military means are the only instruments to reach political ends.

We cannot settle problems if we separate the military questions from the political ones. If now our struggle is only a military struggle, without resolving the political issue, that is genuine independence, freedom, and democracy, then the war will continue.

You propose that we settle the military questions and we have a ceasefire without settling anything about political problems. The aim in our view is to buy time to consolidate the puppet Administration. You still want the puppet Administration to continue the implementation of your policy of Vietnamization, using Vietnamese to combat Vietnamese, Indochinese to combat Indochinese so as to implement your neo-colonialist policy.

You want to use your proposal regarding military questions to make pressure. You want to use your proposal regarding military questions to bargain with us on political problems.

Moreover, you said that your Seven Point Proposal is the final one. So if it is a final proposal, it is an ultimatum. So you want to compel us to accept these seven points, and there is no other proposal. I think that if it is real negotiations, then it should not be a final proposal.

Therefore with this proposal, how can we really believe that you are really negotiating?

I have been telling you that we should look at the realities. But I must say that you have not seen the realities objectively.

I don't want to refer to the realistic situation on the battlefield, but I feel obligated to say a few words about this. The past twelve years of the war in South Vietnam has convinced you that it is a mistake. Moreover you have been saying that you want "no more Vietnams." I think that no mistake can come to success, to victory.

But I believe that Mr. Nixon has not clearly seen this reality. He still wants to continue his policy, his doctrine, that is his policy of Vietnamization. But the reality of the battlefield during the last year shows that the policy of Vietnamization will certainly fail. No doubt you feel that our views differ on this point. It is your right.

In implementing your policy of Vietnamization you want to use the Saigon puppet troops as main forces to launch many operations in 1970 and 1971. You have given a great deal of equipment to the Saigon puppet troops. But the spinal cord of the policy of Vietnamization, that is the puppet troops, have been defeated during the last year. This is the test of the Vietnamization policy.

You have launched also many pacification campaigns aimed at destroying the Viet Cong bases, structures. But this has gone on over the past twelve years since the days of Diem, the bloody dictator who set up so many strategic Hamlets carried out throughout South Vietnam; he did not suppress the structures and bases. And now Thieu, backed up by you, has also carried out many pacification campaigns, but he didn't succeed.

I think that in this term of President Nixon, even if he is reelected once again, he will not succeed in carrying out his policy. I think that time is not on your side. And I think you should not continue your policy of Vietnamization of the war; you should look to reality and begin genuine negotiations so as to peacefully settle the Vietnam problem. This is the only concrete way. We know how to look to reality. We know how to look to the balance of forces on the battlefield so as to settle the problem in a realistic way.

We have on many occasions told you that you are a great country. You say that you should not lose prestige. I frankly tell you that we want to seek a political settlement too of the South Vietnam problem. As a result we have been talking to you for over two years now.

The war is now going on throughout Indochina. Our aim, our policy, is to come to a peaceful settlement of the problems of this area.

We want South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia to become an area really independent, neutral and nonaligned. You must understand this.

South Vietnam cannot be turned into a neo-colonialist country. South Vietnam is not yet a socialist country. South Vietnam must be really independent and neutral. South Vietnam must have a government really reflecting national concerns, including various parties. This is something factual, real.

No party should coerce any other. There must be a really independent and democratic administration, standing for peace. That administration will enter into genuine talks with the PRG. To enter talks with the PRG, to settle all problems, to restore the peace of South Vietnam—that is the imperative demand of various strata of the South Vietnamese population.

If you do not listen to this demand of the South Vietnamese people and you persist in maintaining Thieu-Ky-Khiem, then it would be difficult to come to a settlement.

You keep saying that you do not interfere in the political administration of South Vietnam, that you will not intervene in the political process. This is understandable. But these meetings are real negotiations. We should face the facts.

With regard to Laos and Cambodia, we respect the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Agreements on Laos. We never violate the sovereignty, the neutrality, and the independence of Laos and Cambodia. We shall continue our part to settle the problem of Laos and Cambodia. We shall discuss with our Laotian and Cambodian friends. Only by such a way can we come to a peaceful lasting settlement in this area.

In the negotiations to settle the problems of this area, we should associate the political and military problems. In each country, not only the military questions should be settled but also the political questions.

When this overall settlement is reached, then we can observe a ceasefire. And then we will have international supervision and international guarantee. In the first instance, the problems must be settled between us, you and we.

This is a statement in general terms, an overall view. Further explanation of this will be given by the Minister Xuan Thuy.

What we want is a radical settlement of the problem. Not just a settlement of the political problem of the war, but also a long-term settlement between you and ourselves.

If we really enter into genuine talks, you should seriously study our views, and we will do the same with yours. We want a real negotiation. We should look into the realities and come to a logical settlement, a reasonable settlement.

If you persist in pursuing a policy war, I think that with the experience of the past few years of war you can visualize the prospects. Do you want to settle the war or do you want to extend the war? If the war continues, it will abide by the laws of war. Only with the desire to settle the war, can war be ended. I think peace will be in the interest of you and us. After so many years of war it is our desire to have peace and to rebuild our country. We also, after the restoration of peace, want to establish relations with you. We want to establish

new relations in many fields of interest. But if you continue the war, we have no other way but to continue our fight.

This is not a test for us now. The past twelve years have shown you this test. We know that war brings about losses, but we have no other way. There is nothing more precious for us than independence and freedom.

These are a few words that I wish to express.

Kissinger: Did I understand you to say that the Minister will follow your eloquent remarks with specific proposals or something else?

Xuan Thuy: I propose this. Now we should have a little break and when we resume Mr. Special Adviser shall express his views, if any, on the words of Special Adviser Le Duc Tho. And then I shall make my statement.

Kissinger: Objective reality forces this break.

At this point there was a break lasting about forty-five minutes, during which refreshments were served. Le Duc Tho remained downstairs during the break, engaging in relaxed and pleasant conversation. He sometimes spoke French, but otherwise through an interpreter. Xuan Thuy remained upstairs working on his statement. After the break, the discussion resumed.

Kissinger: Mr. Special Adviser, I found your remarks very eloquent and very important. I would just like to make a few observations.

You began by saying that our previous meetings have always been followed by military actions. I do not think that any purpose is served by reviewing history, but it may be important for you and your colleagues to understand how the same situations look to us.

For example, when we met in February, March and April of 1970, at the same time there was significant North Vietnamese military activity in Laos. Whenever I returned to Washington, I was told that the North Vietnamese were only using these talks in order to gain time to do what they wanted to do militarily.

And the same was true last winter, when I chose perhaps an inadequate method of communicating some thoughts to you. And then it—the delay—was interpreted in Washington as a desire to obtain a military advantage.

So there is a fact that both sides tend to think that the other one is trying to take military advantage and is trying to bring military pressure. Now this problem becomes more difficult in view of the completely different style with which you and we approach negotiations. You have a very principled approach, and therefore you always reason from general principles and you give ground, if at all, only after long intervals of time.

So our people think that you are not negotiating at all. Because we are very practical and we like to talk about very concrete things.

Le Duc Tho: But recently your points are not concrete at all. Minister Xuan Thuy refers to a date. But you give no specific date. You're not specific; let you be specific now.

Kissinger: Special Adviser Le Duc Tho's definition of concreteness is to agree with Hanoi's proposals.

Le Duc Tho: Minister Xuan Thuy has been proposing that you should fix a specific date for consideration.

Kissinger: I have only one request of Mr. Special Adviser Le Duc Tho—that he should let me win in one argument, if our negotiations go on for years, so that I may tell my children that I have won one.

Simply for information, and not to win an argument, I must tell you that every time I return from our meetings here I must justify to my colleagues, primarily the President, what has been accomplished. I agree with the Special Adviser that we were making progress in February–March–April 1970. But, since not everybody knows your methods, it was not that clear to our principals, and therefore they did not think that they were risking a great deal by undertaking some of the measures they did.

Therefore it would be important, for psychological reasons, that if we really want to bring these negotiations to a successful conclusion, that at some point as soon as possible we register an unambiguous definite point of progress. This could have great psychological effect in Washington.

Now let me turn to a few of the specific points that Mr. Special Adviser Le Duc Tho has raised.

Special Adviser Le Duc Tho has asked are we sincere in trying to have negotiations and are we really determined to end the war?

I can assure the Special Adviser that we would consider it the greatest objective that we have set ourselves if we could end this war by a negotiated settlement and end the suffering and bloodshed.

There is nothing to be gained or to be proved anymore by either side by continuing the war.

I can assure the Special Adviser and the Minister that when we make a decision to settle, we shall do it with even greater energy and dedication than in the events of the past few years when we were obliged to make war.

Now, as to specifics.

Special Adviser Le Duc Tho referred to the fact that I pointed out that this was our final offer. Of course, it is our final offer, but you are of course free to make your proposals. We are talking about a negotiation, and not an ultimatum.

The most important issue that Special Adviser Le Duc Tho raised was the issue of the political solution for South Vietnam, and for all Indochina. When we met in March 1970, Special Adviser Le Duc Tho said let us deal with both issues, and if we are blocked in one area let us move to another area.

We think that we are now blocked in the direct approach to the political problem and we have therefore made our proposal first to settle the military problem and thereby indirectly affect the political problem. You have often said that the government in Saigon is held up only by American power. We do not agree with you, but in any event by proposing withdrawal of American forces and a fixed date we can test the correctness of your proposition.

If we do not settle now, the only result will be that we will arrive several years later at the same point we propose today. That is to say, a point where the American forces will be withdrawn and the South Vietnamese will be left to themselves.

I have explained on a number of occasions to Minister Xuan Thuy, and I believe also Mr. Special Adviser, that we cannot, consistent with our principles, simply betray people with whom we have been working for many years. But we are willing to discuss processes which bring about an opportunity, indirectly, for the people of South Vietnam to determine their own future. As I have pointed out before, we do not want anybody to impose his political solution by force, and we will not impose ours.

Maybe there has not been enough imagination on how to bring this about. But my principal point in replying is to assure you. Nobody sees the President more often than I. I know that he sincerely wants peace, and that he will do what is possible consistent with his principles and obligations to bring it about.

So I would like to join the remarks that Mr. Special Adviser made at the end. If we can today make a commitment to peace, and if we can truly agree to make rapid progress, you will find us eager partners on a road toward a peace which will benefit both our people and all people of the world.

Thank you.

Le Duc Tho: I have some remarks.

I do not want to return to your justifications about the fact that after each meeting there were some military attacks. Because the facts are facts.

Now you say you want to come to negotiate a settlement. But this can be done not by words, but only by facts, by realistic proposals, by concrete proposals. But through your proposals, and through your further explanation of your proposals, we don't see anything concrete yet.

If a settlement of the problem is to be reached, it is necessary to settle both military questions and political problems. And as you recall, if we are blocked on one, we shall move to another. But now you reverse your position. If we only settle the military question the problem is not settled.

We shall see how you will settle the problem concretely. We shall continue to listen to you.

Kissinger: We have made our proposal. If you have no other proposals of your own, I have nothing more to say.

Xuan Thuy: Now let me say a few words.

After considering your Seven Point Proposal made in a private meeting on May 31, 1971, and after listening to the further explanations given by Mr. Special Adviser Kissinger, we see that your proposal is not yet complete because your Seven Point Program said nothing about the political problem as we have agreed.

Mr. Special Adviser Kissinger says that Mr. Le Duc Tho and I said once that we should settle parallelly the military and political problems, and if we are blocked on one we should shift to a discussion of the other.

Actually we did make such a statement. But we maintain our stand that both questions should be discussed parallelly. We should raise these two questions; we should speak of them, because they are linked.

Yet in the Seven Point Program the U.S. government made no mention at all of the political. Only in your further explanation did Mr. Special Adviser say that the military settlement would have an indirect effect on the political problem.

Le Duc Tho: The U.S. participated in the 1954 and the 1962 Geneva Conferences. And then the political and military problems were never separated. When we settle military problems we should see the perspectives of the political settlement.

I just mention here a few small things, but very concrete. If we end the war, will there be democratic liberties for the people. Will they be free from reprisals? Will they be free to have general elections in South Vietnam?

We see we have come to an agreement just a few months ago and now you have changed your stand. Now we wonder if we come to an agreement, will you keep your agreement or will you tear it up?

Xuan Thuy: Now, as I have said here on many occasions, the U.S. withdraws troops, but it does not withdraw its forces rapidly and totally. According to the statements made by representatives of the White House and Pentagon we see that the intention of the U.S. is to leave behind its naval and air forces to support Saigon. In the meantime the U.S. wants to support the Saigon Administration. As I told you last time and in many previous times.

Mr. Special Adviser said you did not intervene in the political affairs of South Vietnam. But the facts are just the reverse. If so, we cannot put an end to the war. The U.S. cannot achieve what it has been saying, that it will get out of the war. It cannot do that.

For instance, you have just said when you answered my question, you talked about ceasefire throughout Indochina, all military activity except air reconnaissance, and this air reconnaissance can lead to war. I don't know about Laos and Cambodia, but as for the DRV, as a sovereign country, we cannot bear reconnaissance flights over our country. This is our position.

Now, on behalf of the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam we would like to put forward to the U.S. Government our Nine Point Peace Program.

Kissinger: Is that a new proposal?

Xuan Thuy: Yes, you said last time that after considering your proposal, we should bring something new. After considering your proposal we feel it is not complete enough.

Kissinger: You are two points ahead of us again. I accept it, but I notice it.

Xuan Thuy: This proves our desire is more earnest than yours to end the war because we have more points.

Kissinger: George Bernard Shaw once said that, "I wrote a long letter because I didn't have time to write a short one."

(Xuan Thuy then reads the nine points from a prepared text.)

Point One. The withdrawal of the totality of U.S. forces and those of foreign countries in the U.S. camp from South Vietnam and other Indochinese countries should be completed within 1971.

Point Two. The release of all military men and civilians captured in the war should be carried out in parallel and completed at the same time as the troop withdrawals mentioned in Point One.

Point Three. In South Vietnam the U.S. should stop supporting Thieu/Ky/Khiem so that there may be set up in Saigon a new Administration standing for peace, independence, neutrality, and democracy. The Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam will enter into talks with that Administration to settle the internal affairs of South Vietnam and to achieve national concord.

Point Four. The United States Government must bear full responsibility for the damages caused by the United States to the peace of the whole of Vietnam. The government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam demand from the U.S. Government reparations for the damage caused by the U.S. in the two zones of Vietnam.

Point Five. The U.S. should respect the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Indochina and those of 1962 on Laos. It should stop its aggression and intervention in the Indochinese countries and let their people settle by themselves their own affairs.

Point Six. The problems existing among the Indochinese countries should be settled by the Indochinese parties on the basis of mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in each other's affairs. As far as it is concerned, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam is prepared to join in resolving such problems.

Point Seven. All the parties should achieve a cease-fire after the signing of the agreements on the above mentioned problems.

Point Eight. There should be an international supervision.

Point Nine. There should be an international guarantee for the fundamental national rights of the Indochinese peoples, the neutrality of South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, and lasting peace in this region.

The above points form an integrated whole and are closely related to one another.¹⁵

Le Duc Tho: This provision is similar to yours.

Kissinger: Can I have the text so I can ask questions? I will give it back. (He was given the text.)

Xuan Thuy: Our proposal is a comprehensive one, a complete one, a logical, reasonable, and realistic one. It will lead to a lasting settlement. It will bring about a peaceful, independent, and stable Indochina, in the interest of the Indochinese people and of the U.S. and peace. I hope the U.S. will promptly respond to it so that we may reach a settlement.

Kissinger: May I ask some clarification?

On no. 3, where you say in South Vietnam the U.S. should stop supporting Thieu, Ky, Khiem, what do you mean by that phrase?

Xuan Thuy: In this connection, we have expressed our views to Mr. Special Adviser and other U.S. delegates many times. We mean that the leaders of the Saigon Administration, such as Mr. Thieu, which is a group, although the U.S. says they are elected by the people, and they have a political structure, as a matter of fact, they are put into power by the U.S.

¹⁵ In his June 27 memorandum to the President summarizing this meeting, Kissinger commented that the North Vietnamese nine-point proposal "contains both negative and positive elements, but it is encouraging that they made a concrete rejoinder for the first time in the negotiations and emphasized their willingness to negotiate on the basis of both our proposals and theirs."

Kissinger: But what concretely do you want us to do besides withdraw our troops? If we accept this, what is our obligation?

Xuan Thuy: The Thieu, Ky, Khiem Administration constitutes an obstacle to the ending of the war, and to the restoration of peace, and to the work of the Paris Conference, because this Administration is opposed to communism, neutrality, and coalition. They always say they would use military means to end the war.

Therefore this Administration should be changed. How to change them I think you know better than we do.

Kissinger: I just want to understand. In other words, you are saying that we should leave Vietnam by the end of 1971, and on the way out we overthrow the Thieu, Ky, Khiem government. Is that correct?

Xuan Thuy: We have been saying all the time that both military and political questions should be settled at the same time. So in the military field you should complete withdrawals by 1971. In the political field you should change Thieu, Ky, Khiem. You have put them into power. You know how to change them.

Actually both problems should be settled in 1971. I think you have actually an opportunity to achieve this, to show that you are really willing to withdraw, really willing to respect the right to self-determination in South Vietnam.

Le Duc Tho: Because the internal affairs of South Vietnam can be settled only if there is in South Vietnam an Administration standing for peace, independence, neutrality and democracy. By forming such an Administration you will create a favorable atmosphere for talks with the PRG.

For so many years now this Administration, set up by the U.S., is very bellicose, warlike. And it would be very difficult to talk and settle the problem with this Administration. There must be some favorable atmosphere for negotiations.

Kissinger: Let me ask one more question, just for clarification.

On point six. "As far as it is concerned, the DRV is prepared to join in resolving these problems." What does this mean?

Xuan Thuy: The DRV has common frontiers with other Indochina countries. In April 1970, the Summit Conference of the Indochinese peoples was held and in this Conference, the people of Indochina expressed their sense of solidarity and unity to repel the war of aggression, to defend their sovereignty, their independence and their territorial integrity.¹⁶ This is the connection, the relationship we have. That is why we put that sentence.

¹⁶ The Summit Conference of Indochinese Peoples was held April 24–25.

Kissinger: You have no common frontiers with Cambodia.

Xuan Thuy: It is because of the solidarity of the Indochinese people.

Kissinger: Does this phrase mean that you will withdraw your troops from these countries?

Xuan Thuy: We have always said that the DRV respects the Geneva Agreements of 1954 on Indochina and 1962 on Laos. We have refrained from interfering in the internal affairs of these countries. At the Indochina Conference of peoples we expressed solidarity and mutual help.

Kissinger: If you consider what you have been doing in Indochina since 1962 as noninterference, it is not considered particularly reassuring for my colleagues in Washington. They suffer from the illusion that there are 100,000 North Vietnamese in Laos.

Xuan Thuy: The Vietnamese are present in Laos and Cambodia, even in France, in the U.S.

Kissinger: In organized military units?

Xuan Thuy: I do not think so.

Mr. Special Adviser says that your colleagues in Washington will not be assured by this point because they are worried about history. If you speak about history, then I should refer to the historical origin of the situation and it will be long. And you have expressed no wish to return to the origins of the war. It will be long and we will be worried if we look into the origin of the war.

Kissinger: Can you answer one question that I will be asked in Washington? What is new in this proposal that you have not offered before?

Xuan Thuy: Please examine and you will see something new.

Kissinger: But you cannot tell me?

Xuan Thuy: I find many new points.

Kissinger: Give me one or two examples.

Xuan Thuy: All this is new. If you compare with the four points, with the eight and the ten points,¹⁷ that we support, and even with the seven points you will find something new.

Kissinger: Compared to the seven points, I have no difficulty finding something new. But that is not my question. Are you saying anything that we should give special consideration? That's what you asked me last time.

¹⁷ For the four-point proposal, see *Foreign Relations, 1964–1968*, volume II, Vietnam, January–June 1965, Document 245. For the eight-point proposal, see Documents 41 and 43. Regarding the ten-point proposal, see footnote 2, Document 35.

Xuan Thuy: Last time when I asked you the question, you did not answer and you said we should consider your proposal. I think you should do the same.

Kissinger: Are you now proposing we discuss your nine points and our seven points, or only your nine points?

Xuan Thuy: We are prepared to discuss both the nine points and the seven points.

Kissinger: Let me make final observation.

We will consider all this, except point four, which is completely inadmissible and should not be put to a great country. We have offered on a number of occasions voluntarily economic aid, but the phrase reparations is completely inadmissible.

Le Duc Tho: It is your view. Both sides should study and consider.

Xuan Thuy: I would like to add one more point. You are the professor. If the U.S. has prestige in the eyes of the world, if the U.S. is respected by the world, it is not because the U.S. has a great amount of modern weapons or a great amount of finances. The U.S. is respected and appreciated because of the history of the U.S. and the struggle of the U.S. for the cause of independence and peace. And what is the noblest thing is the equality of people in the world.

Therefore you should not say that being a great country you cannot accept this point. Because after causing damages, now you repair damages.

As you said that your seven points is a final proposal, we said this was an ultimatum if you use the world final. You said it is not an ultimatum. Therefore we said it is our view that it is natural that you should give a response.

Moreover this point four will be discussed and you should also consider.

Kissinger: Keep in mind that there are points of honor and principle involved for us. Two American Presidents have indicated that we are ready to give economic aid. We will do this as a voluntary act and a sign of good will and basis for new relationship. We will not do it as an obligation and as a condition for ending the war.

Le Duc Tho: As Minister Xuan Thuy has just said, these nine points will be subject to discussion.

But there is one point I would like to mention.

Our country has been subject to aggression and tremendous destruction for over twelve past years. If now a small amount of money is paid for damages that is something legitimate, and common sense shared by everyone in the world.

But it is one of the questions. The main thing is that military and political problems, these great problems should be settled.

Kissinger: Let me ask one more question. The last time I saw Minister Xuan Thuy, you had a peace proposal which was published two days after we met. What do you plan this time?

Xuan Thuy: These nine points are given to you for consideration.

Kissinger: My question is: If we discuss them, along with our seven points, will you keep them secret during our discussions or will you publish them?

Xuan Thuy: We shall discuss together these seven and nine points. Your question is not yet clear to me.

Kissinger: The question is, we have kept our proposals to you secret while we discussed. You have presented these nine points. Can we assume you will keep them secret while we discuss them or will you publish them?

Xuan Thuy: The private meetings will be kept according to habitual rules.

Kissinger: In other words, we will keep our proposal secret and you keep yours secret.

(Xuan Thuy nods yes.)

Kissinger: Agreed?

Xuan Thuy: Agreed.

Kissinger: We will consider your proposal and give you our reply at another meeting.

In addition, I wanted to mention two things.

But first, can we set a date for another meeting?

Xuan Thuy: Yes. You should consider our proposals and have views to express and we should meet again.

Kissinger: I agree.

In the light of this and other matters, I intend to pay a visit to Saigon to form my own judgment of the situation. I intend to do this within about a week or so. I will do it with a minimum of publicity, but it will be known especially since my colleague, Mr. Special Adviser, is always well-informed on my program.

Xuan Thuy: Your trips are unknown to us. Also your weekends. Only the weekends when you come here do we know where you are. We know only of your working hours.

Have you finished?

Kissinger: I would suggest, because it would fit into my travel schedule, July 12th, that's a Monday.

This would be on my return from Asia and therefore would attract little attention. Is that agreeable?

Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy: (After discussion) We agree.

Xuan Thuy: By the way, I would like to mention to you that Mme. Binh recently told me that it would be advisable and appreciated if she would have the opportunity to meet an American representative and if possible high-ranking, for example you, so that she may expose completely and fully her views. With you would be good.

Kissinger: I am afraid of her.

Xuan Thuy: She's a very attractive lady.

Kissinger: Let us see if we make progress in our discussions. Then we can see what the prospects are.

(Xuan Thuy and Le Duc Tho nod concurrence.)

Let me make one general proposition. We have talked together for a long time now. It is obvious to me that in drawing up the nine points you stated your ideal program. Obviously, each side in preparing its program is more conscious of its own needs than those of the other side's. I think you know which points of this program are most difficult or most objectionable for us, without my describing them in detail.

We shall look at these points with the attitude, which I have described to the Special Adviser, that we would like to come to a rapid solution.

I hope you will look at ours from the same point of view.

Let us both make an effort next time to see whether we can register some concrete progress at one meeting, so that we will be encouraged when we return to our respective duties that we have made some progress and that more progress must be made.

Perhaps one way to proceed is for both of us to try to see which of the other's points we are willing to accept so that we can put those aside and at the end of the next meeting we will have reduced them to those which we haven't solved.

Le Duc Tho: Minister Xuan Thuy and myself have told you many times that we have been talking for six or seven times but this time today we put forward the nine points. It is obvious that these nine points mark progress. Now we have made our proposal. You will consider it and next time you will put forward concrete things, logically, seriously, and reasonably.

Kissinger: The Special Adviser is not implying that this is different from what I say today?

Le Duc Tho: What is important is that you give an answer to our nine points. At least we have given concrete points and your seven points are too general. So next time you should raise your questions. And if we put aside points we agree upon we should refrain from reversal of agreement. There should be parallel settlement of military and political problems.

Kissinger: We will look this over and you will again look at our remarks. Let us both try to make significant progress at the next meeting.

And let us both keep secrecy about the nature of these discussions. Otherwise it will be impossible to continue.

Xuan Thuy: While apart we will keep these meetings secret.

Kissinger: And the points?

Xuan Thuy: Yes.

Kissinger: And Mme. Binh also?

Xuan Thuy: But you refuse to meet her.

Kissinger: That is a serious question. If Mme. Binh publishes these nine points, we will publish our seven points and break off the channel.

Xuan Thuy: We shall keep this forum secret. As for Mme. Binh or the PRG, the last time you suggested a number of things. I told you that this was suggestion. I cannot answer for Mme. Binh.

Kissinger: I just want to tell the consequences. If your persuasive powers fail, and she publishes a nine point program, we will only discuss it in the public forum, at Kleber. If we make significant progress, the time may come when we can talk to other parties.

Xuan Thuy: We should all say that we desire peace and should come to a settlement of the war. Because the continuation of the war will not be in the interest of anyone.

Kissinger: That is our attitude. We will make major efforts in that direction.

I also have the selfish reason to keep my colleague, the Special Adviser, here in Paris for a while.

Le Duc Tho: It depends on you.

If you put forth something concrete and there is progress, I will settle.

Kissinger: We will meet on the 12th. At 10:30?

Le Duc Tho: We should make an effort and serious negotiations to come to a settlement.

Kissinger: This will be our attitude. But we should look at each other's necessities. We will look at yours. But we hope you will make an effort to look at ours.¹⁸

¹⁸ In Kissinger's June 27 memorandum to the President summarizing this meeting, he concluded: "The real meaning of their counter-proposal and their discussion is as of now unclear. There remains the strong possibility that there can be no negotiated solution except on terms which we cannot accept. Their position and approach were consistent with an attempt on their part to gain time. It was also consistent, however, with moving toward our approach for if they are to do that they must first go through the exercise of fighting for their political demands and showing that we were unyielding."

10:30 on the 12th.

Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. It's always a pleasure to see you.

(To Le Duc Tho) It's a pleasure to renew our acquaintance.

Xuan Thuy: We are very glad to meet you.

Kissinger: It's our misfortune that people I like so much personally are on the other side.

Xuan Thuy: That is precisely the reason why we should promptly end the war. Then there is no difference of sides.

And so, as I told you, we always end our meetings with a smile.

224. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, June 29, 1971.

SUBJECT

Military Assistance for Cambodia

Secretary Laird recommends that the Military Equipment Delivery Team (MEDT) in Phnom Penh be increased from the 23 now assigned to a total of 50 (Tab B).² He also recommends that the role of Counselor for Political/Military Affairs in the Embassy, Phnom Penh, as CINCPAC Special Representative for Military Assistance in Cambodia be terminated. Secretary Laird believes that the addition of these personnel is essential to provide a minimum capability to discharge responsibilities under the Foreign Assistance Act and is essential to the administration, management and control of the military assistance program in Cambodia.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 512, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. XIII. Top. Secret. Sent for action. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² Attached but not printed at Tab B is a June 21 memorandum from Laird to Nixon. According to another copy, Nutter forwarded it to Laird under a June 5 covering memorandum and indicated that Moorer endorsed the recommendations of the MEDT Chief and Abrams for 77 more military personnel. (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330-74-083, Box 151, Cambodia 1971, 000.1-0.92)

Secretary Rogers nonconcur in Secretary Laird's recommendation that the MEDT be increased (Tab C).³ He believes that the on-going SRG study concerning the full range of our military assistance program issues should be completed before any decision is taken to increase the number of personnel. State and our Ambassador to Phnom Penh have consistently opposed any increase on the ground that it would tend to raise our profile significantly and involve us more heavily in the situation there. State also believes that much of the necessary work can be performed by personnel on temporary duty rather than permanently stationed in Phnom Penh.

This has been a long-standing argument. The fact is that we have a major program with heavy deliveries scheduled over the coming months. We must do all we can to assure that we get the best results from the resources we are making available to Cambodia. Thus I believe that Secretary Laird's request for an increase in personnel should be approved.

On the other hand, Mr. Ladd was put in the Embassy at your specific direction. He has an important role to play in effecting the kind of liaison relationship between the Ambassador, the MEDT and CINCPAC, which has in the past been of great value and which in the future will enable us to keep close tabs on the situation. There is a real need within the Embassy for a man to coordinate the various security related programs. I therefore recommend that you disapprove Secretary Laird's recommendation that Mr. Ladd's role as CINCPAC Special Representative be terminated and direct that his position in the Embassy be strengthened commensurate with the role of coordinating security related programs.

The memorandum at Tab A⁴ would give effect to my recommendations that the recommended increase be approved and that Ladd continue as CINCPAC representative with a strengthened position and role in the Embassy.

Recommendation: That you approve my forwarding the memo at Tab A.⁵

³ Attached but not printed at Tab C is a June 28 memorandum from Rogers to Nixon. Rogers also sent a copy to Laird under a June 28 letter. (Ibid., OSD Files: FRC 330-76-197, Box 61, Cambodia May-Dec 1971, 091.3)

⁴ Attached but not printed at Tab A is a July 1 memorandum from Kissinger to Laird and Rogers informing them of Nixon's decision.

⁵ Nixon initialed his approval.

225. Editorial Note

In July 1971, the Presidential election campaign in the Republic of Vietnam, scheduled for October 3, intensified as the three potential candidates, President Nguyen Van Thieu, Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, and General Duong Van Minh, actively sought the requisite number of endorsements from either Senators or provincial legislators needed by August 3 to qualify to run. Under the Presidential election law, passed by the South Vietnamese National Assembly on June 3 and signed into law by President Thieu on June 24, each candidate needed the endorsement of either 40 members of the national legislature or 100 provincial or municipal council members in order to run. (Telegram 10019 from Saigon, June 24; National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 14 VIET S)

In his 93d message to the President, May 9, Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, wrote: “We shall choose appropriate opportunities to emphasize our policy of non-intervention and that we want to see a fair and honest election. But the opinion will still be generally held here in Viet-Nam that we want Thieu re-elected. Despite the problem posed by the competition of both Ky and Minh as candidates, I think Thieu at this stage is clearly the front runner.” The message is printed in *The Bunker Papers, Reports to the President From Vietnam, 1967–1973*, pages 829–837. Kissinger provided a summary of the message to President Nixon in a memorandum, May 20. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 155, Vietnam Country Files, Viet July 71)

On May 27, the Embassy in Saigon issued the following instructions to its personnel on how to approach the upcoming elections:

“U.S. military and civilian personnel must not offer or give support to any candidate or group of candidates, political party or organization. They must avoid implying by word, deed or acts of presence that the United States supports any individual candidate or group of candidates or political party for elective office. No American-controlled equipment, supplies, transportation or other facilities may be used in behalf of such candidates or in connection with the campaigns and the elections.” (Telegram 6169 from Saigon; *ibid.*, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 14 VIET S)

National Security Council staff member W. R. Smyser forwarded a draft of the instructions to Henry Kissinger under a covering memorandum on May 19 and Kissinger approved them with some modifications on May 26. In a separate memorandum to Kissinger on May 19, however, Smyser wrote that the draft instructions “will be a very tricky issue, especially in light of our other plans.” (*Ibid.*, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 154, Vietnam Country Files, Viet 1 May–31 May 71) The “plans” were the decision by the 40 Committee

on February 4 to provide Thieu with covert support. See Document 119.

On July 15, Bunker met with Thieu to discuss allegations of campaign irregularities. Bunker noted that “Many of the charges are no doubt greatly overdrawn,” and Thieu denied them. (Telegram 11152 from Saigon, July 15; *ibid.*, Box 155, Vietnam Country Files, Viet July 71) Evidence of election malfeasance mounted, prompting Bunker to set up a follow-up meeting on July 28 to discuss the “unfair practices that are threatening to make it impossible for Vice President Ky to obtain certification.” In telegram 11939 from Saigon, July 28, Bunker detailed many reports of election irregularities, including complaints from Ky and Minh that their supporters had been harassed and threatened, province chiefs registering endorsements from provincial representatives on blank certificates or in Thieu’s name to prevent them from endorsing other candidates, and province chiefs making themselves unavailable to certify endorsements for Ky. (*Ibid.*, Box 869, For the President’s Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Cables, 10/69–12/31/71) In his reporting telegram on the meeting, Bunker wrote that he “found it desirable to underscore on several occasions my opinion that an uncontested election in Vietnam would create an impossible situation in the U.S., that Thieu is a strong frontrunner whether he is opposed by one or two opponents and that the practices being pursued in his behalf, in addition to being unacceptable per se, are unnecessary.” Bunker described the meeting as follows: “Thieu was visibly disturbed by my statement. He underscored the constraints he is under as President in not being able to respond to malicious and often untrue criticism of him by Ky and Minh groups. I said that his dignity and restraint in response to these provocations had worked to his advantage.” Bunker added, “throughout the conversation, which was difficult, the President was defensive and restrained himself with difficulty. He did not, however, challenge the essential accuracy of my presentation. Toward the end, he said he would see what he could do about the situation and let me know.” (Telegram 11936, July 28; *ibid.*)

In backchannel message 103 to Kissinger, July 28, Bunker commented further on his meeting with Thieu: “While I am not overly optimistic, since Thieu’s henchmen have gone far in rounding up endorsements for him, I hope at least further obstructions of Ky’s efforts will be terminated.” He added that Prime Minister Khiem had sent out instructions to the province chiefs on July 27 to desist in these activities. (*Ibid.*, Box 854, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. X)

Under mounting pressure from the United States Congress and press to ensure that the South Vietnamese elections were free and fair, the administration had considered having Thieu invite an international observer team into the country to oversee the process. Secretary of State William Rogers forwarded a proposal to the President in a memoran-

dum, May 24, recommending that the administration discreetly endorse a resolution that had been introduced in Congress for a 15-member team appointed by the House, Senate, and President. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 14 VIET S) Initially, Kissinger endorsed a proposal in a June 3 memorandum from National Security Council staff member John Holdridge to create an ad hoc group to study the idea, but according to the correspondence profile attached to the memorandum, the White House informed the Department on September 8 that it was rejecting the plan. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 155, Vietnam Country Files, Viet July 71)

226. Memorandum from W. Richard Smyser of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, July 1, 1971.

SUBJECT

Mme. Binh's "Seven Points"

Mme. Binh's latest "Seven Points"² are obviously intended largely for public impact in this country and in South Vietnam. This is particularly evident in the pledge to release POW's³ and also in the very soft formulations of such touchy issues as reparations and a new government in Saigon. It moves some way toward our position on several issues, and can thus be considered positive, but its publication at this time is obviously not intended to make life easier. It is also specif-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 853, For the President's Files, Winston Lord China Trip, Vietnam, Vol. IX. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for information. A handwritten note at the top indicates that Haig passed the memorandum to Kissinger, who initialed it. All brackets are in the original.

² Madame Binh introduced the Seven Point peace proposal, July 1, at the 119th plenary session of the Paris Peace Talks. The text was published in *The New York Times*, July 2, 1971, p. 2.

³ Laird cautioned against the United States allowing the issue of American prisoners' release and return to be used as a principal bargaining element, particularly because Hanoi was diplomatically vulnerable on the issue and their vulnerability could be used to the United States' advantage. Murphy forwarded Laird's warning in a July 12 memorandum to Kissinger. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 190, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, 7 Jan 71–1 Jul 71)

ically geared to have an impact in South Vietnam, perhaps to help Minh.⁴

It drops some of the issues presented in the “nine points,” most specifically the provision for international supervision and the material related to Indochina.⁵ It is less strongly worded than the “nine points” with regard to reparations. It also has material on reunification which had not been in the “nine points.”

Going down the material point by point I have the following comments:

Point 1. Here, in contrast to the nine points, they have again introduced the full panoply of demands which include such items as the withdrawal of all equipment, dismantling of all bases, etc.

In addition, and most important from the public point of view, they have pledged to release our POW's at the same time as we withdraw our forces. They presumably also want their men released, since they speak of the release of “military men of all parties.” It is difficult to understand precisely what they mean when they say that “the parties will . . . agree on the modalities” of release at the same time as we set a withdrawal date in 1971, but this is not what will hit the public eye.

They repeat the usual material about arranging for our safety and they say that a ceasefire between us and them would be reached on the same day as we give a deadline. As you know, this is essentially designed to stop our interdiction.

Point 2. This point, which deals with “the question of power in South Vietnam,” is much more softly worded than previous statements on this issue, and is intended perhaps at least in part to meet some of our concerns. It does not speak of “coalition” but of a “three-segment government of national concord.” It does not say what the elements in this government should be, nor how it should be formed; on the latter point they say that “the political, social and religious forces in South Vietnam aspiring to peace and national concord will use various means . . .”⁶

⁴ In telegram 11529 from Paris, the Delegation concurred that the Seven Point peace proposal's purpose was to force the administration to set an unconditional withdrawal date in 1971 and thereby drive a wedge between the United States and South Vietnam, elevate the PRG to the level of an equal negotiating partner, and aid Thieu's political rivals. (Ibid.)

⁵ See Document 223.

⁶ Attached but not printed is Intelligence Information Cable TDCS-314/07197-71. According to the cable, Binh claimed that the use of the term “concord” was pure semantics. She said that once a “peace cabinet” was formed in Saigon, it could negotiate with the PRG to form a “provisional coalition government” that could include some members of the Thieu administration and the PRG, as well as people who had not been linked to either group.

Troublesome in its implication for our continued aid is the demand that we must “put an end to [our] interference in the internal affairs of South Vietnam, cease backing the bellicose group headed by Nguyen Van Thieu . . . and stop all maneuvers, including tricks on elections, aimed at maintaining the puppet Nguyen Van Thieu.” The emphasis on the elections is interesting in that it again reveals their concern about the outcome of the current political process.

They repeat that there will be a ceasefire among the Vietnamese as soon as a government of “national concord” is formed.

There is also some generally standard material about guarantees of freedom, against reprisal, etc., and something about improving the standard of living of the people.

As for the formation of the final government, they again speak of “holding of genuinely free, democratic, and fair general elections in South Vietnam.”

Point 3. This point, which deals with the “question of Vietnamese armed forces in South Vietnam,” is generally like their earlier statement on this subject, but spelled out in more positive detail and obviously intended to appeal to the Vietnamese with its expression of desire “to make lighter the people’s contributions.”

Point 4. The usual language about reunification “step by step”, by an agreement between the two zones.

There is also the usual material regarding the need for South and North Vietnam to comply with the provisions of the Geneva Accords.

Point 5. This is a demand that the new South Vietnamese Government follow a policy of neutrality, written in standard language. It is accompanied by the statement that South Vietnam and the U.S. will “after the end of the war” establish relations on this basis “in the political, economic, and cultural fields” (not military).

Point 6. This is the reparations clause, but worded very carefully to read: “Regarding the damages caused by the U.S. to the Vietnamese people in the two zones. The U.S. Government must bear full responsibility for the loss and the destruction it has caused to the Vietnamese people in the two zones.”

As you can see, the demand remains what it was in the ten points and the nine points, but it is put much more carefully.

Point 7. This point deals very vaguely with the question of international guarantees, merely stating that “the parties will find agreement on the forms of respect and international guarantee of the accords that will be concluded.”

There is no general provision, as in the nine points or the five points, to the effect that all these points form a whole.⁷

⁷ Nixon, Kissinger, and Haig briefly discussed the administration's response to Binh's proposal during a July 1 meeting on Kissinger's upcoming secret trip to China. According to a memorandum for the President's file, the three men agreed that while the administration should not get into a detailed exposition of the proposal's pros and cons, it should not reject it publicly at this time. Instead, it should emphasize that additional discussions should be held within established forums. (Memorandum for the President's Files, July 1; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Geopolitical Files—China, China Trips, July 1971 Briefing Notebook)

227. Conversation Among President Nixon, his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and his Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)¹

Washington, July 1, 1971.

Kissinger: This was Rogers, who just wanted to talk about it. He's going up to testify—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —and he just wanted to know how to—what the [unclear]—

Nixon: Is this about the papers? Do you think he's gonna have to testify on the papers? Is that what he—the *Pentagon Papers*?

Kissinger: No, on the—

Nixon: This thing?

Kissinger: —on the Vietnam proposal.² But Sullivan is also thinking that he'll—as long as they've added his political conditions, we're in good shape.

Nixon: Sure, but it's the same offer. I mean, we're not going to overthrow—

Kissinger: Yeah.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 534–3. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. The exchange is part of a larger conversation, 9:54–10:26 a.m.

² See Document 226.

Nixon: —throw our—oh, and the thing is to not to use the word “overthrow” with “Thieu–Ky government.” You understand, Al?

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: We’re not going to turn the country over—17 million people—over to the Communists against their will. Put that down and get those sons-of-bitches to say it that way. Do I come through?

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: We are not going to—what they are saying is to turn 17 million South Vietnamese over to the Communists against their will.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: That’s right. With the—and, and to—against their will with the, with the bloodbath that would be sure to follow. Put those words in! Now, I want them to go out and say it. Get out there and tell them to say it right now!

228. National Security Decision Memorandum 118¹

Washington, July 3, 1971.

MEMORANDUM FOR

The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense

SUBJECT

Improvements in South Vietnamese Forces

I have carefully reviewed the assessment of the military situation in Vietnam in 1972 undertaken by the Senior Review Group and the Department of Defense paper, forwarded by Deputy Secretary Packard’s June 18, 1971 memorandum, summarizing the alternatives that emerged from this assessment.²

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–225, Policy Papers (1969–1974), National Security Decision Memorandums, NSDM 118. Top Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. Copies were sent to the Director of Central Intelligence and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Kissinger sent the draft NSDM 118 to Nixon under an undated covering memorandum, in which he explained that it was an outgrowth of extensive interagency review of the military situation in South Vietnam and based on an SRG paper that was also attached. (Ibid.)

² Not printed. (Ibid.)

I have decided that the U.S. will provide support for RVNAF forces in FY 1972 in accordance with alternative 2 as described in the Department of Defense paper and as recommended by the Secretary of Defense.

Specifically the Department of Defense and the U.S. Mission to South Vietnam should take actions immediately to accomplish the following:

—Take special measures, including training and promotion programs and urging the removal of incompetent commanders, to improve South Vietnamese military leadership and morale. A program to provide incentive (dislocation or combat) pay to RVNAF units in combat in isolated areas should be implemented.

—Increase manning levels in RVNAF combat and other key units to 90 percent.

—Strengthen RVNAF forces in Military Regions 1 and 2 by such measures as the addition of another division in MR 1 and a division headquarters with appropriate support in MR 2.

Alternative 2 should be negotiated and implemented, particularly in regard to the strengthening of RVNAF forces in MRs 1 and 2, in a manner that does not provide the GVN with perverse incentives with regard to the security of MRs 3 and 4. Should the GVN request U.S. support for additions to RVNAF beyond 1.1 million men in FY 72 and in the judgment of the U.S. Mission the alternative of adding to RVNAF forces by removing or demobilizing units in MRs 3 and 4 involves excessive risks to the security of these areas, the U.S. is willing to consider an increase beyond 1.1 million men. U.S. support for any such increase would be contingent on demonstration by the GVN that such increases would not jeopardize the attainment of manning levels of 90 percent in combat and other key units.

The Secretary of Defense will be in charge of implementing these actions in coordination with the Secretary of State and the U.S. Mission to South Vietnam. He should report to me by September 1, 1971, the actions that have been taken to implement these decisions.³

Richard Nixon

³ Laird sent the follow-up report in a September 4 memorandum to Nixon. Kissinger forwarded it to Nixon under a September 20 covering memorandum, noting that all the actions directed by NSDM 118 were underway, but that the combat pay proposal was still under discussion; that Laird had set a goal of manning ARVN units up to 90 percent by January 1, 1972; and that MACV was still pushing the ARVN to rid itself of poor leaders. Nixon approved the report and Kissinger sent a September 20 memorandum to Laird thanking him for his efforts and requesting another report on December 1. (Ibid., Box H-218, Policy Papers (1969–1974), National Security Decision Memoranda, NSDM 118)

229. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, July 3, 1971.

SUBJECT

The Current Military Situation and Short Term Prospects in North Laos

The CIA recently submitted to the Washington Special Actions Group a report on the current military situation and short term prospects in north Laos.² The major points in that report follow.

—General Vang Pao, leader of the pro-government irregular troops in north Laos, began a counteroffensive in early June to retake certain points on the southern part of the Plain of Jars.

—In so doing, he hopes to threaten the flank and rear of NVA forces operating southwest of the plain, thereby forcing them to pull back from that area. He also hopes to relieve enemy pressure in the vicinity of Bouam Long, an area which is important to his fellow Meo tribesmen.

—So far, Vang Pao has failed to retake his initial target, which is still well defended by enemy forces. But he has seized another point on the southern part of the plain, which serves the same general objectives. As a result, elements of two enemy units have withdrawn to the southern part of the plain.

—Vang Pao intends to reinforce positions he captures with Thai irregulars, thus freeing his own forces for further initiatives.

—During the remainder of the rainy season Vang Pao will probably continue to maneuver flexibly and to exploit any tactical advantages he may develop in the process.

—No new enemy offensives are foreseen during this period. On the other hand, enemy forces are well entrenched and Vang Pao will probably not make as much headway as he did during the same period last year.

Comment. Vang Pao is proceeding with more flexibility than we had originally anticipated. His decision to bypass his original target in

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 549, Country Files-Far East, Laos 1 Jul–31 Dec 71. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information. Haig signed for Kissinger. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² A June 24 memorandum from Karamessines to Kissinger, Johnson, Packard, and Moorer, entitled "Vang Pao's Objectives in Current Operations On or Near the Plain of Jars." (Ibid.)

favor of a secondary objective was not fully coordinated with the CIA Station in Laos. However, the Station has reported that it would be unrealistic to expect Vang Pao to adhere to a rigid schedule. The CIA Station believes that his moves have been sound so far, and it promises to do its best to keep them that way.

230. Editorial Note

On July 3, 1971, in a telephone conversation with Alexander Haig, the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs, President Nixon complained about the North Vietnamese insistence that the United States end its support of South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu, Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, and Prime Minister Tran Thien Khiem. Their discussion went as follows:

"President: I was wondering—one thought you might send on to Henry for his Paris meeting. If he has to haggle about our support of the South Vietnamese, why doesn't he just throw in a hooker—'let's consider the outside support for North Vietnam.' I mean they are supported by the Chinese and Russians. The question is do they want to talk about a trade-off.

"Haig: Good.

"President: He can say we are not interested in this being a place of conflict, but if it is neutral it has to be neutral on both sides." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 998, Haig Chronological Files, Haig Telcons 1971)

On July 9, after a brief discussion of Kissinger's secret trip to China, July 9–12, the President raised with Haig the issue of Kissinger's upcoming secret meeting with the North Vietnamese in Paris on July 12. According to a transcript of their conversation, they had the following exchange:

"President: As far as anything he does in Paris, we can still get instructions to him, can't we?

"Haig: Yes Sir. I have a direct contact.

"President: We should think about that. We have got to set it up so that we can hit them if necessary. I am thinking if negotiations break off. What you do is say, alright, it has broken down, we will withdraw but we have to protect our withdrawal but we also have to get our prisoners back but since the negotiations have broken down we shall bomb certain targets until the prisoners are returned. I think if you have a breakdown in negotiations and—I think we will be right up the creek.

“Haig: They might say you are killing your own people and they might then turn around and execute them.

“President: Yes, that is the danger, but I don’t know what we can do. A strong warning might do it.” (Ibid.)

Finally, in an undated message to Lieutenant General Vernon Walters, Senior Military Attaché in the Embassy in Paris, Haig instructed that the following message be passed to Kissinger:

“Leader has again directed that I convey to you his wishes that in your discussions you emphasize, in no uncertain terms, the decisiveness of this round. Leader states it is essential that he know as a result of this round whether or not the other side is truly interested in negotiated settlement. He is clearly thinking of discontinuing future efforts. I made it clear to him, based on your last communication, that at least one other session would be required. He has accepted this but is adamant that the sessions not go beyond that unless there is substantial movement. You should be aware that he is seriously considering that alternate plan which he has mentioned previously, of moving out precipitously and concurrently undertaking major air effort against North. Obviously this message is characterized by overkill and instructions must be interpreted in the light of your discussions at previous stop. I did feel you should have the benefit of atmosphere here.” (Ibid., Box 853, For the President’s Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David, Vol. IX)

231. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Saigon, July 4, 1971, 10:40 a.m.–12:20 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

President Thieu, Republic of South Vietnam
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Hon. Ellsworth Bunker, U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam
Mr. Winston Lord, NSC Staff

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 103, Country Files, Far East, Vietnam, Saigon Background Docs. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting took place in the President’s Palace. Lord forwarded it under an August 4 covering memorandum to Kissinger, who approved it, along with a decision to keep it in the White House files only, for no wider distribution.

There were some opening pleasantries during which President Thieu asked about President Nixon. Dr. Kissinger said that the President sent his warm regards to President Thieu. He then presented President Thieu with a gift of a Steuben glass horsehead.

Meeting Between Two Presidents

After some more pleasantries, Dr. Kissinger conveyed the President's enormous regret that he had decided it was best that he and President Thieu not meet this month. He noted that there were two problems: one in Vietnam and one in America. He then explained that there was an extremely complicated situation in the Senate where various amendments were being tacked on to the Draft Bill and military and economic appropriations, both of which were up this month. Senators were adding amendments designed to cut off funds. So far all the amendments had been defeated, except the Mansfield Amendment which would not have the force of law, but rather was the sense of the Senate. The President was worried therefore, that putting Vietnam in the front of the debate, coupled with the theft of the Pentagon documents, would create an impossible situation. Dr. Kissinger added parenthetically that the President's papers would not leave the White House; they would stay there only for him and not for the cabinet or the bureaucracy.

Dr. Kissinger continued that President Nixon had great admiration for President Thieu. He would do anything he could to support South Vietnam, and the U.S. remained committed to achieving common objectives. He thought that cancellation of this meeting was on behalf of common objectives. He was here to do whatever he could do on behalf of the President. He hoped that the meeting was deferred and not canceled.

President Thieu responded that he understood that the meeting at the present time would have created disturbances for President Nixon. Dr. Kissinger added that coming right after the Viet Cong peace proposal,² the meeting would have meant an impossible situation in America. President Thieu said that he wished to have the meeting not for any purpose except for continuing personal contact with President Nixon and to request what South Vietnam needed. He had asked Ambassador Bunker to present to the President three points, knowing that the U.S. needed to withdraw troops very substantially from next year.

² See Document 226.

Enemy Plans and South Vietnam's Needs

President Thieu then said that South Vietnam needed the following:

1. Continued air support and logistics support for many more years.
2. Strengthening and modernizing the Vietnamese Army and armed forces which the South Vietnamese felt should be done more rapidly.
3. Long range economic and social assistance.

If he supported strengthening and modernization it was because after analyzing the situation the South Vietnamese see very clearly that if it were not for the Laos operation last February they would have difficulty next year, not over the entire country but at certain points, because the Communists had the capability to concentrate their efforts to seek very limited military victories. This would probably be in the northern provinces below the DMZ. They had more capability and opportunity there than in other parts of the country because they had a big concentration of troops in Laos and that section was linked with North Vietnam so the logistics were easier. Even now the last few weeks they had tried to move down the Khesanh corridor and would like to wipe out the fire base. They would continue to do this until the elections, trying to inflict casualties and achieve foreign policy and propaganda impact rather than real success. He said he thought Lam Son 719 and the Cambodian operations had foiled what they planned to do through 1971.

Right after the elections, after the rainy season in Laos, and with concentration of logistics, they would try again to have another effort somewhere at the beginning of 1972. He believed this would take place in MR 1. Dr. Kissinger asked whether they would try also in MR 2, and President Thieu said that that region was their secondary effort and MR 1 was their main effort.

President Thieu continued that if they failed again, that would not cease their action forever, because they would like to do something for propaganda pressure in Vietnam and the U.S., to demonstrate that Vietnamization and the Nixon Doctrine had failed. They hoped with some military victories to have some influence on the 1972 U.S. elections. By the end of 1972 and the beginning of 1973 (at the usual seasonal cycle), after U.S. elections, there would be no political situation to play upon. Then there would be the real situation in Vietnam, with most American troops withdrawn and the North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese face-to-face. This would be the last confrontation between the two armies, the last big battle deciding the issue of the war. This was the reason why South Vietnam still needed continued logistics and air support, fire power and mobility, bombing and helicopters. At the time

that all responsibility of the war would belong to the Vietnamese they needed modernization for their force because the Communist regular army would attack and they would have to oppose them like Laos.

Thus, he thought the danger was over for 1971. In 1972 and 1973 they would still have many very hard battles to defeat the Viet Cong. If they didn't take over somewhere they would back off. Meanwhile, South Vietnam still needed some effort and the support of U.S. airpower along with the strengthening and modernizing of the armed forces. That was most important in order to resist and to defend itself.

He hoped with that assistance that by 1973 the Communists would fade away and negotiate seriously while staying in Laos and Cambodia. In Vietnam they could say that they were defending themselves. They would need economic assistance. He said that if he had met President Nixon he would have asked for this support.

Dr. Kissinger said that Ambassador Bunker had had a long talk with President Nixon.³ He said that President Thieu could be sure that everything he said would go to President Nixon word-for-word. He worked very closely with the President. Direct talks were of course better, but the next best thing was his immediate and personal attention. He would transmit President Thieu's words exactly to the President.

Paris Negotiations

Dr. Kissinger told President Thieu about the last Paris meeting with Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy. He said that as Ambassador Bunker had explained, the first meeting (May 31)⁴ had no real content and was simply an exploration of their willingness to negotiate. In the second meeting (June 26)⁵ the North Vietnamese gave us a nine point program which was roughly the same as the seven point program of Madame Binh in Paris on Thursday. Four days after promising not to make the proposal public, Madame Binh's proposal, which was almost exactly the same, was published. One could see how trustworthy they were.

Madame Binh's proposal mentioned reunification which was not covered in the North Vietnamese nine points, while the latter had language on the neutrality of Laos and Cambodia which Madame Binh's plan did not. In every other way they were almost exactly the same. On prisoners they promised to release them in exchange for U.S. withdrawals, agreeing to discuss the modalities. One point said that we should stop supporting Thieu/Ky/Khiem. Dr. Kissinger remarked that he didn't have the impression that Ky was of great support for Thieu,

³ See Document 220.

⁴ See Document 207.

⁵ See Document 223.

but they didn't say coalition government or replace Thieu/Ky/Khiem as they always had before. Dr. Kissinger explained that he kept asking the North Vietnamese what this point meant, and they replied that we would know what it meant. He told President Thieu that the U.S. had said that under no circumstances would it do anything to interfere with the government in Saigon. He assured President Thieu that under no circumstances would the U.S. agree with any such proposals.

Another interesting aspect of the North Vietnamese proposal was that for the first time they said it was negotiable, and they were willing to bargain. Always before they said, "you must" while this time they said "you should." When Dr. Kissinger would object, they would say, let's bargain, whereas formerly they would say their proposals were the basis of negotiations. This time they said that we should talk about both our proposals and their proposals and bargain.

Dr. Kissinger remarked that he didn't know exactly what the North Vietnamese proposal meant, and that he would see them on July 12 on the way back to the U.S. He would say that some proposals were acceptable, such as the neutrality of Laos and Cambodia and the release of prisoners, while under no circumstances would the U.S. interfere with the South Vietnamese government. Then we would see that would happen. Probably President Thieu was right, that they wouldn't wish to negotiate.

President Thieu said that the first thing to notice was the timing of the North Vietnamese proposal, i.e., July 1, recalling that they had demanded a final date of U.S. withdrawals of June 30 which had now been reached without agreement. Thus, psychologically, they were now renewing their proposal.

Secondly, President Thieu said, having studied the proposal he thought that the only new thing was on prisoners, which was aimed at the U.S. public rather than the Vietnamese. Concerning Vietnam and political questions, points 2–5 represented no change. There was nothing new. Instead of coalition they said "national concord," but the meaning was the same. On prisoners they had said before that they would discuss this after withdrawals; now they said they would agree. It was a matter of vocabulary rather than real meaning. He had asked his Foreign Minister to study the proposal and to give guidance to Ambassador Lam. The South Vietnamese were ready to work together with the U.S. and, with the approval of President Nixon, to get together a common position for next Thursday's plenary session. Ambassador Lam and Ambassador Bruce should use the same tone.

Dr. Kissinger responded that he agreed absolutely and that this approach would have our support.

President Thieu continued that he had told Ambassador Lam to wait until Tuesday, because on Monday the South Vietnamese would

work with Ambassador Bunker who would get guidance from Washington. He had told Lam that by Tuesday he would send supplementary guidelines. Bruce and he should use the same language which would be agreed upon by Ambassador Bunker and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs so that final word could go to Paris on Tuesday.

Dr. Kissinger agreed. He knew what was on the President's mind and could work with Ambassador Bunker, with only technical reference to Washington since he had had a long talk with the President before he left and knew what he wanted. For President Thieu's information, he had told Ambassador Bruce to take a very strong line on Thursday.⁶ President Thieu said that up to now they had said nothing except that they would study the proposal carefully and give an official answer on Thursday. They would have something to say by next Thursday.

Dr. Kissinger replied that he was not absolutely sure about this approach. His own sense of tactics suggested that they should ask some questions to highlight the ambiguities of the position of the other side. President Thieu said that they could ask for clarifications, noting that opponents would not like a strong statement. Dr. Kissinger believed that on Thursday the US and GVN should primarily ask questions, bringing out points like "agree" versus "discuss" and the fact that "national concord" was no real change in position. Dr. Kissinger, Ambassador Bunker, and President Thieu agreed that the allied side should concentrate on asking questions this week and avoid a flat answer within a week, there being many points to clarify. Maybe they were changing their position and if not, we could always reject it the following week. We could renew our own proposals, such as the President's October 7, 1970, speech.⁷ It was agreed that this was better tactics, for the other side would like us to reject their proposal outright so they could label us as warmongers. Thus, the South Vietnamese would work with Ambassador Bunker and instructions would be sent to Bruce and Lam.

Dr. Kissinger said that if President Thieu agreed, he could use a separate channel to Bruce and tell him that what we wanted was a series of questions to bring out the inconsistencies of the other side's proposal, to clarify and to enable us to go back to the October 7 and South Vietnamese proposals. For example, when the other side mentioned ceasefire, we could say that we had already offered this. President Thieu agreed that we should do this.

⁶ The plenary session of the Paris Peace Talks was scheduled to resume July 8.

⁷ See Document 46.

Dr. Kissinger said that the U.S. was not eager to move fast. The other side should not dictate the pace of events. He would see them Monday and would, of course, immediately send a message to Bunker on what went on. He would never see them without informing President Thieu. The other side had wanted him to meet Madame Binh, and he had rejected this completely. Madame Binh had publicly said that she would like to meet him on Monday, and we rejected this publicly. President Thieu could be sure that he would never meet her or the NLF unless President Thieu wanted him to.

Korean Troops

President Thieu said that Prime Minister Khiem and President Park had met on the question of withdrawal of Korean troops from Vietnam. President Park proposed that from December 1971 to June 1972 they would withdraw only 10,000 Korean troops from Vietnam. The remaining force, about 37,860, would be discussed later on. President Park had no date to prescribe. He said that, as he had promised his people during the election, he must withdraw the 10,000 man marine brigade between December 1971 and June 1972. He would leave the other two divisions. That was the final proposal of President Park.

Dr. Kissinger and Ambassador Bunker commented that this was very good news. Dr. Kissinger said that the U.S. had studied this question and had concluded that the marine brigade should go, being dependent on American support, while the other two divisions should stay.

President Thieu said that he had told Ambassador Bunker and the Koreans that they still needed the Korean troops in MR 2. Next year was crucial. The South Vietnamese would use all their general reserves in MR 1 to cope with the situation there. They might phase out more divisions from territorial responsibility to reinforce MR 1 and MR 2 and they might be asked by the Cambodian government to help somewhere. The effort next year would be in MR 1, where there would be a new North Vietnamese offensive. They would be ready with some other reserve divisions for Cambodia. These were his main efforts.

In MR 2 there were only two Vietnamese divisions so they needed two Korean divisions on the seacoast in order to maintain the results of pacification while the South Vietnamese fought the war on the borders.

Dr. Kissinger said South Vietnam had the strong support of President Nixon. If anyone said anything different, he should tell Ambassador Bunker. The U.S. thought that South Vietnam needed to cover MR 2 and they would have full support. President Nixon had approved a study and the United States would do what it could. He was delighted that they agreed on the military objectives.

President Thieu said that President Park had said that only those troops he promised in the campaign would leave, and that he thought Thieu would be happy with this. Dr. Kissinger said the U.S. would use its influence with President Park in June if there were any difficulties. President Thieu thought this Korean decision was correct. Dr. Kissinger said that he was delighted, that the decision was just right since the marines were not so good. Ambassador Bunker added that they took special equipment and didn't get along with the South Vietnamese people.

South Vietnamese Deployments and U.S. Funding

Ambassador Bunker asked President Thieu how he would reinforce MR 1. President Thieu replied that he would do this with airborne and marines, and he would phase out the 9th Division in the Delta in the next 5 months to be ready as a general reserve for MR 3 and Cambodia. Dr. Kissinger commented that the U.S. had always been told that Vietnamese troops couldn't move out of their region without a loss in morale and an increase in desertions. President Thieu said that the 9th Division would be on temporary missions in MR 3 and Cambodia as a general reserve and wouldn't move to MR 1. Dr. Kissinger commented that U.S. studies showed that even with reserves there would be trouble in MR 1. President Thieu said that he must rotate troops, and these would be marines and not the 9th Division. In response to Dr. Kissinger's question, he thought that this would be enough for MR 1 and he could compensate with air power.

Dr. Kissinger told President Thieu for his information—that there had not been official notification to General Abrams,—that President Nixon had just approved a program to strengthen ARVN so that manning levels would be up to 90%; he thought they were 78% now.⁸ This would cost the U.S. \$200 million and should help the South Vietnamese. The U.S. would be willing, if the South Vietnamese thought it necessary, to support the creation of new units in MR 1 and MR 2. It was up to the South Vietnamese to make recommendations.

Thus, there were two alternatives. They could stay within the 1.1 million man ceiling by reducing forces in MR 3 and 4. If not, the U.S. would support an increase of up to 50,000 men in MR 1 and 2 if this was what the South Vietnamese wanted. This was not official; the South Vietnamese must request it after which the U.S. would approve it. Dr. Kissinger confirmed that this 50,000 was in addition to the 1.1 million ceiling. The other option was an increase in manning levels. Bureaucratically, it was somewhat easier for the U.S. to stay within the 1.1 million ceiling, but the U.S. wanted the South Vietnamese to succeed. There

⁸ See Document 228.

would be no awards for keeping down the force levels, and the important thing was to succeed. He repeated that the U.S. would support the South Vietnamese in any way, and that the 50,000 increase was in the President's mind but that it must be requested through Ambassador Bunker. President Thieu should forward his request not just to Abrams but also to Bunker.⁹

Ambassador Bunker asked President Thieu about recruitment in MR 1. President Thieu replied that he could move some personnel from the PSDF. Sometimes pacification and security had disadvantages: now that there was a security back in the villages, the men said that they wanted to be local soldiers and stay with their families. Thus the South Vietnamese needed new formulas to refill their units. He thought that in MR 1 the 50,000 manpower figure would not be difficult.

Dr. Kissinger repeated that the decisions would be left to the South Vietnamese. They could reduce forces in MR 3 and 4 and recruit an additional 50,000 in MR 1 and 2, and thus stay within the present ceiling. This was already approved and no decision was necessary. If, on the other hand, they wanted to keep force levels in MR 3 and 4 and add 50,000 more, that would be approved in the White House. He should make his request to Ambassador Bunker, and he could assure President Thieu that it would be approved.

U.S. Withdrawals

President Thieu asked if there were any new plans for troop withdrawals. Dr. Kissinger replied that there were no plans yet for reducing forces next year. Regardless of what the press said, he was not in Saigon to discuss new withdrawals. The U.S. would wait until September–October and then discuss the situation. There was no need to make an announcement until November 15. And before then the U.S. would not accelerate the plan that it now had. Thus, President Thieu should disregard the press; there were politicians who were racing each other for publicity on this question. 5000 troops, more or less, were good for a one day headline but would mean nothing to the next Presidential election. Before December 1 there would be no further troops withdrawn beyond what was planned. After that, because of our own elections, the U.S. would have to make some pretty drastic moves, but

⁹ Lord noted in his August 4 covering memorandum that one of the key points from this meeting was strengthening the ARVN. Kissinger wrote next to it: "Make sure Laird knows this." On July 21, Kissinger sent Laird a memorandum noting that Nixon had directed him to take all feasible actions to increase in-country military assistance. Laird reported to the President on the actions he had taken in an August 20 memorandum. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 157, Vietnam Country Files, Viet Sept 71)

President Thieu had always known this. There was no fixed number and the analysis had not been done yet.

He asked President Thieu for his recommendation for next summer, adding that he was not here to discuss this question, and if President Thieu had not raised it he would not have raised it. President Thieu noted that there would still be 184,000 American troops on December 1. Because of the election campaign and U.S. opinion the Vietnamese guessed that next year the U.S. would withdraw forces so that at least by October 1972, just before elections, at least 100,000–120,000 would leave. Thus, President Nixon could announce that when he was elected there were 560,000 Americans in Vietnam and now at the end of his term there were only 50,000 or 70,000. Everyone in South Vietnam thought this was the most logical and political way for President Nixon. Dr. Kissinger asked him what he believed.

President Thieu responded that he had said many times that there were two aspects to the problem. First, there was the capability of Vietnam to replace U.S. forces. Even if next year there were 70,000 or 80,000 or 100,000, the combat mission would be practically ended. Dr. Kissinger interjected that he was right from the combat point of view. President Thieu continued that the South Vietnamese problem was to be ready before that day to cope with the situation, before the U.S. elections, and after the elections in the summer of 1973. That was why he had asked frankly about modernization. Whatever the level, 100 or 50 or 20 thousand was not very big.

The second question was how the U.S. saw its place in this region. Would it withdraw all its troops and rely on air power and the 7th Fleet only, or would it retain some troops, not in South Vietnam, but in this part of the world? That depended on the American conception and its decision on how many men should be in South Vietnam even if South Vietnam had a full capability to defend against the threat. South Vietnam needed a so-called residual force of advisers, technicians, and logistics people. This must be conceived in the sense of the American presence in South Vietnam.

Dr. Kissinger said that he would give President Thieu some answers. He noted that President Thieu thought more precisely than the U.S. bureaucracy and had touched on some questions that had not been formally studied. Thus, he could only give impressions and an attitude. He agreed with the point that it would not make much difference what the numbers were below a certain level, because the combat capability was not very great. Below that level, we must think what the troops were supposed to do.

He then sketched what seemed possible in order of domestic difficulty. Advisers, technicians, logistics people, not organized in big military units, were the easiest, would stay the longest, and would pre-

sent very little difficulty. Secondly, air power was the next easiest, especially on carriers and based in Thailand, and even air power to some extent in Vietnam. Thirdly, logistical troops in organized units were harder, but helicopter companies for example, should be possible the better part of 1972. Fourthly, on infantry units, he must be honest. There were no decisions yet but this would be hard. We must always decide whether in fighting a battle for a particular unit, we might lose the battle for all other units. He would not delude President Thieu. The Administration had opponents who were not just for making peace but wanted to defeat South Vietnam. The government's problem was to give them a minimum point of attack. Infantry units after a certain point would be the hardest problem. There might be some security forces, but he would prefer not to make them a point of issue right now.

U.S. Support

Dr. Kissinger commented that the U.S. was in a transitory period. In a couple of years the tide would turn, many people now speaking loudly would be on the defensive. Over the long term the U.S. must and would play a role in Southeast Asia. He thought that South Vietnam could count on the kind of units he had described for some period of time.

Concerning air support, the U.S. was in the process of establishing sortie rates for this year and next year. Based on his conversations with Abrams, although this was not yet approved, he foresaw that 10,000 tactical sorties and 1000 B-52 sorties through the calendar year would almost certainly be approved. He and Ambassador Bunker confirmed that this was about the same level as now. Dr. Kissinger added that he was saying what he "thought", for he had to be correct. The President must sign his approval, but he almost always approved his recommendations. If President Thieu had any problems, he should tell Ambassador Bunker immediately. The President had told him to talk with President Thieu and Abrams and then decide. The only question was whether there should be 10,000 sorties for the whole period or 9,000, with a surge capability to 12,000. He asked President Thieu's view. President Thieu replied that he thought that General Abrams' proposal was correct. He confirmed that he thought the 10,000 level was probably preferable to 9,000 with a surge capability.

President Thieu said that he would like to discuss artillery and helicopters for 1972–1973. There would be a shift from the present level to less than 50 percent in terms of helicopter ability and artillery for the next year or 1973. He wanted to understand what might make up for this, perhaps by compensating VNAF with new units and helicopters. As for air power, the figures they had discussed were quite correct.

Dr. Kissinger replied that the U.S. view, for example on helicopters, was to do what it could. The U.S. had always been told that the South Vietnamese could not handle more. If they could, that would be approved. If the South Vietnamese convinced Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams that they could use more helicopters, the U.S. would provide them. The U.S. would do what it could to keep the maximum number of helicopter companies in Vietnam. We would fix redeployments so that helicopters came out last.

President Thieu said that South Vietnamese capability relied on two things, fire power and mobility. Thus continued air support and enough helicopters to move and lift fast would compensate and give the South Vietnamese the ability to cope with the situation.

Ambassador Bunker asked President Thieu for his views on artillery. President Thieu replied the first question was how to provide more artillery to South Vietnamese troops. If they could do that, they would use the artillery units to support regular forces. Dr. Kissinger replied that he didn't know about artillery; there hadn't been any studies on it or Presidential decisions. He knew that the President favored President Thieu's ideas on helicopters and he would look into the question of artillery. President Thieu commented that concerning artillery he would like some more explanation concerning what General Abrams had submitted. Ambassador Bunker said that he and General Abrams would get together. President Thieu said that after that he would ask for what he still needed.

South Vietnamese Military Plans

Ambassador Bunker asked President Thieu about crossborder operations, and Dr. Kissinger remarked that he had planned to raise this issue also. President Thieu replied that he thought the South Vietnamese would launch new operations. After Lam Son 719 the North Vietnamese understood that they were no longer safe from attack. Two years ago they never believed the South Vietnamese could launch offensives in Cambodia because of the political situation. Now after the changed regime in Cambodia they realized that the South Vietnamese had the military capability to do so. Therefore Lam Son 719 was not a surprise. Returnees and prisoners said that the North Vietnamese had been prepared for a South Vietnamese offensive in Laos for eight months, since the time they had seen the success in Cambodia. Thus they judged that the South Vietnamese could do this and that the next step would be in Laos. They had been prepared psychologically, politically and technically for at least six months. They had suffered heavy casualties in Lam Son 719 at which time the South Vietnamese still had the logistic support of the U.S. in MR 1.

Now this year they must look ahead to what they would do next. He didn't rule out South Vietnamese capabilities in Laos next year even

though there would be less U.S. support. They could still do this on some scale. The North Vietnamese were shifting westward, were opening new roads in the Bolovens Plateau area, getting ready for a long war. In that area they would be out of the range of the South Vietnamese. Thus they were shifting everything westward and avoiding the South Vietnamese reach. Even in Cambodia they made no efforts between Phnom Penh and the Parrots Beak area. Everything was shifted so that they would be out of the reach of the South Vietnamese forces, tactical air and helicopters and even infantry. They wanted to control the Bolovens Plateau, use it as a stronghold and wage either conventional or guerrilla warfare from there. They intended to occupy the Battabung and Siem Reap regions, believing that they were safer with Thai troops than with South Vietnamese. If they could, they would build up the Khmer Rouge, bring Sihanouk back and liberate Cambodia.

If they did not succeed in Vietnam and even if there were peace there, then with their positions in the Bolovens Plateau and Cambodia they could continue a long-term war. Even with temporary peace in Vietnam, they could wage a long-range war from these strongholds.

President Thieu continued that he didn't know whether they would attack Laos. There were three North Vietnamese divisions in Cambodia therefore the next South Vietnamese attack would be in Cambodia rather than Laos. In response to Dr. Kissinger's query, President Thieu said this would be after the rainy season if he were elected.

Dr. Kissinger commented that President's Thieu's friends were less worried about his being elected than about his having opponents. President Thieu said that he was not overoptimistic. Dr. Kissinger said the U.S. wanted him to have opponents.

President Thieu said that he hoped to take care of the situation in MR 3 and 4 and Cambodia so that they would have a free hand for MR 1 and 2. Dr. Kissinger asked him if he thought they could do this, and President Thieu replied that he thought so, that if they solved the problems in the South then they could handle them in the North. Dr. Kissinger remarked that they had not succeeded this year with three divisions. President Thieu noted that there had been a change in command and the problems of the rainy season. He would move many of the divisions, not just three, and there would be a bigger campaign. He would pull other divisions from MR 3 and 4. He would give the troops in MR 3 and 4 six months to consolidate pacification and then he would pull one division from them and the Rangers. Dr. Kissinger asked whether the South Vietnamese would attack in the Kratie region. President Thieu replied that maybe the Viet Cong would change their positions. Dr. Kissinger remarked that no general would tell his real intentions.

President Thieu said that the North Vietnamese would like to break south through the South Vietnamese line, because they were being held North of Route 7. They would like to break through and threaten Phnom Penh and regain the old base areas that they had had in Cambodia. For now, the South Vietnamese were just conducting defensive operations, not letting them through, but after the rainy season they would push them westward. He hoped the Cambodian Government would make some military and pacification efforts, noting that they were slow on pacification. Dr. Kissinger commented that they had no experience in this. President Thieu said that the South Vietnamese would help them and would like to cooperate. Cambodians had to do something about pacification and were in a better position to do this now. The Cambodian countryside was not controlled by either the government or the Khmer Rouge. It would be up to those who arrived first. President Thieu confirmed for Dr. Kissinger that the South Vietnamese worked closely with the Cambodians but not yet on pacification. They were ready to start on the latter. He didn't think the Communists were very strong judging from what they were doing. Cambodia had two rainy seasons and these two respites helped Cambodia.

President Thieu then confirmed that the South Vietnamese planned major efforts right after the rainy season in October. From November the Viet Cong would increase their infiltration until March before launching offensives, per the usual yearly cycle. Dr. Kissinger asked whether they might launch offensives before then, and President Thieu said that February might be a good time. Dr. Kissinger noted that they would be strong in MR 1 by then. President Thieu replied that they must take care of the southern situation first. The South Vietnamese must make their offensive first in Cambodia; then after that they could cope with the situation in MR 1. It would be more difficult than last time. In response to Dr. Kissinger's question, President Thieu thought the South Vietnamese would be ready for the Communist offensive in MR 1 by February.

Dr. Kissinger told President Thieu that one of the comments the U.S. often heard was that the performance of the South Vietnamese forces improved tremendously when there were good commanders in charge. Some Americans thought that this was the biggest problem.

President Thieu noted the lack of good commanders. They tried to do their best but this was a general weakness of a fast-growing army. Dr. Kissinger commented that General Tri's death was a big loss, and President Thieu agreed, saying that they needed more generals like him.

South Vietnamese Elections

Dr. Kissinger asked President Thieu how the elections looked to him. President Thieu said that this time they were very well organized

and the people were familiar with elections. They were much better organized with the new system than before. He wanted to emphasize two points, better organization and fairness. With the experience of the elections in the Lower House, by August they would improve their system if necessary. He said that the candidates for the Lower House were starting well, with ten candidates for each seat, although this was not good in the sense of political organization. A good many people were interested. Ambassador Bunker noted the great political interest. President Thieu said that this time the quality of candidates for the Lower House was better and that many more prominent figures were taking part. Dr. Kissinger commented that if the South Vietnamese had good candidates, they should lend the U.S. a few.

Ambassador Bunker asked whether endorsements would be any problem for Minh and Ky. President Thieu said that he thought Minh would get enough, and Ky, too. When he promulgated the law he did not think it would hurt Minh or Ky. Those two seem well enough known in terms of political reputation and prestige to get enough signatures. He told Dr. Kissinger frankly that he promulgated the law for other purposes, i.e., not to allow fantasist candidates like 1967. Dr. Kissinger commented that the South Vietnamese didn't want ten candidates, and President Thieu replied this time there would be very many more. President Thieu thought that any President, whether Minh, Ky or himself, should have sufficient prestige and not a 35% vote like before. This was important also for political stability.

Dr. Kissinger said that he understood. Since he thought that Americans knew nothing about South Vietnamese domestic politics, he had no personal view. The US understood the problem of stability. The US position was that elections should be conducted fairly and that this would strengthen the position of South Vietnam and its friends.

He asked President Thieu what he thought of having observers for the elections. President Thieu responded that they would welcome organized groups or private individuals to come to South Vietnam. They planned to have inter-ministerial committees charged with providing any information that these observers would like, to give means of travel to the observers, to explain and answer their questions and to guide them around. They would demonstrate that the elections were fair and well-organized, and observers could go anywhere they wished, ask any questions and raise any problems. These committees would deal with all such questions. Also, they would send information to the South Vietnamese embassies in foreign countries to explain to those who couldn't come to observe for themselves.

The objective was to have real political parties, to support the government and to provide a real opposition. Dr. Kissinger noted that this was related to having few candidates. President Thieu said that he

wanted them to take sides. Ambassador Bunker asked if President Thieu were elected whether he would form a party and the opposition would form one so that there would be two for the next elections. President Thieu responded that there would be two big parties and maybe ten-twenty smaller ones. Dr. Kissinger commented that the South Vietnamese political situation was like France before DeGaulle. President Thieu said that this party system might be established for 1975. In 1967 many political leaders asked that the military run the Presidency and hoped that in 1971 they would be united and continue the struggle. He had hoped in 1971 that there would be many civilian candidates and at least two big parties. However, after two years they had done nothing. He had tried to help but they were divided much more than before. This time he said that there were no alliances. He could frankly say that he would have his party and they would have theirs. He was looking for good competition and political life. Under his Administration they were free to have democratic expression and to organize parties. But they were divided, with everyone wanting to be a leader.

Dr. Kissinger recalled that in 1966 Ambassador Lodge had tried to lecture the South Vietnamese on a constitution. President Thieu had said that he was worried about some colonel marching on Saigon, and after that he could worry about a constitution, because his authority and not a constitution would stop that colonel. Dr. Kissinger said that President Thieu had accomplished this first step by establishing his authority, but if he could accomplish the second step by 1975 that would be a tremendous achievement.

Economic Assistance

Dr. Kissinger said that he knew that President Thieu wanted to discuss economic development. He and President Thieu agreed that they were not economists. President Thieu said that his Economic Minister had had a good trip and met many influential people. The problems were first, that the US Government accept in principle that they wished to help South Vietnam over the long range, and secondly, to work very closely together. They had a good team now.

Dr. Kissinger said that he had met with the team the day before and there had been a meeting in Washington. He assured President Thieu on behalf of President Nixon that the US was prepared to provide a long-range economic assistance program for South Vietnam. The size and nature of the program was a matter for the technicians. The South Vietnamese should discuss reforms which would free the economy somewhat. The US would give assistance to make the programs succeed. The US intended to go to Congress for long-range military assistance at the same time as for the economic program. He felt that there would be less resistance to the economic assistance and that this would be no problem.

Ambassador Bunker confirmed that this was his impression also.

Dr. Kissinger continued that there were two problems, first, stabilization, which was going pretty well and, second, long-term development which must get started soon. This was receiving our energetic attention. He said that the US had ideas about administration reforms. The Administration had given instructions to American personnel to be very cooperative, and the US had encouraged other countries to do the same thing. Ambassador Bunker commented that the South Vietnamese had a good team.

Drugs

Dr. Kissinger said he wanted to mention another problem on which the South Vietnamese were already working. The narcotics problem was of tremendous concern to the US and anything that President Thieu could do personally was the key. This was a big problem. If it spread, no matter what else the US did, it might force withdrawals.

Dr. Kissinger closed by saying that it was always a privilege to see President Thieu and that he wished him and the country well. Both countries had suffered a great deal. They had not come all this way in order to lose.

The US wanted President Thieu to succeed, wanted South Vietnam to succeed, and they had a great friend in President Nixon.

President Thieu said that he appreciated President Nixon's sending Dr. Kissinger to Saigon and he appreciated Dr. Kissinger's frankness.

Dr. Kissinger said that he would tell the press that they had had a very fruitful talk, but he would not discuss the subjects they had covered. He asked President Thieu whether this was agreeable, and the latter confirmed that it was.

After a few more pleasantries, the meeting was concluded.¹⁰

¹⁰ In backchannel message 684 from Saigon, July 4, Kissinger characterized the meeting as productive and added that the assurances from Nixon to Thieu came at a very opportune time. (Ibid., Box 1025, Presidential/HAK Memcons, MemCon–President Thieu, HAK, and Amb. Bunker July 4, 1971) Bunker reported on the meeting in telegram 10853 from Saigon, July 5, but left out references to Kissinger's meetings with the North Vietnamese and his explicit commitments on troop withdrawals, military assistance, and air sortie rates. (Ibid., Box 155, Vietnam Country Files, Viet July 71)

232. Memorandum From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to President Nixon¹

Washington, July 5, 1971.

SUBJECT

Dr. Kissinger's Meeting with Vietnamese Politicians

Attached is Dr. Kissinger's report of his meetings with various Vietnamese politicians on July 5, 1971.² He makes the following significant observations:

—Ky seems quite ready to run but is worried about getting the necessary signatures to qualify as a Presidential candidate and seems very bitter about Thieu. Ky is ready to have the Communist party function legally in South Vietnam.

—Minh gave the impression of not having finally made up his mind to run. He feels that a "hands off" neutrality in the election by the U.S. is not enough. Minh's program consists of the reconciliation of North and South Vietnam as separate entities, and the legalization of the Communist party without its admission into a coalition government.

—In meetings with the President of the Senate Huyen, leader of the principal opposition party Bong, and the leading Buddhist Senator Mau, all of them showed great wariness of Madame Binh's seven points although they thought there were some interesting new elements.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 155, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam July 71. Secret; Nodis. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² Attached but not printed is a July 5 memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon.

233. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, July 14, 1971.

SUBJECT

My Meeting with the North Vietnamese, July 12, 1971

I met again with the North Vietnamese on July 12.²

The tone of the meeting was very positive and the other side tried hard to be serious and constructive. I think we have now reached essential agreement on all issues except the political one, and their remarks in the meeting indicated that they would look at this question seriously between now and the next meeting.

Key Points

The following remarks and actions by the North Vietnamese indicated their desire to engage in serious negotiations:

—They said after my presentation that we had made more progress than ever before although I did not really give them anything.

—They pointed out—even before I had done so—that there were a number of areas of agreement between their points and ours, including even the cease-fire. This is unprecedented.

—Although they said our seven points were not yet “concrete” they accepted them as a basis of negotiation in conjunction with their own nine points and they said that the two were congruent in major respects.³

—They repeatedly stressed—in an almost plaintive tone—that they wanted to settle the war.

—They expressed a great desire to reach agreement quickly, and voiced what appeared to be genuine concern about the delay which might result from debate about a withdrawal date.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 853, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. IX. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, “The President has seen.”

² A memorandum of conversation, July 12, is *ibid.*

³ Haig sent a version of the memorandum that did not include this paragraph to Rogers under a July 14 covering memorandum. Haig attached a note to Kissinger indicating that Rogers read and returned it to him without comment. (*Ibid.*)

—They, in effect, dismissed Mme. Binh’s seven points, saying that they were different from their own nine points⁴ and that we should negotiate on the latter.

—They again asked one of my staff to read them the exact text of my remarks on their points so they could take them down verbatim.

—They agreed to a cease-fire, though only after a political settlement.

—They also asked a number of questions about our aid offer, indicating they are prepared to drop their demand for reparations.

The Political Issue

It is now more clear than ever that Hanoi is debating how to resolve the political issue. We have agreed in principle on eight of the nine points, and the political issue is the only remaining problem.

Both Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy repeatedly said that we had to get rid of President Thieu, but Tho said that our refusal to do that would make a settlement “difficult” to reach, rather than “impossible” (as Thuy had said earlier).

When I asked them how they would propose for us to do this, they came up with such vague formulas as our not supporting Thieu in the election, or persuading him not to run.

They now need to make up their minds about what kinds of risks they are ready to run, and whether they will give up their demand that we do their political work for them. This is a difficult and fundamental decision for them, and I think they know they will have to make it soon.

—They obviously fear that Thieu’s re-election will freeze the political outcome against them.

—They also appear very reluctant to face yet another cycle of military action.

—Their statements on the issue at the meeting conveyed the sense of being made for the record, as evidence that they had done all they could to get us to accept their view.

Given their desire for a settlement, and some of the other things which are going to be developing, I think there is a better than ever chance that they will shift their position on the political issue and will do it by the next meeting.

What Happened:

I opened the meeting with a very sharp attack on them for having published Mme. Binh’s seven points. I told them that this repre-

⁴ In the version given to Rogers, the words “nine points” were not included.

sented a breach of confidence since they had told me that they would not publish their nine⁵ points, which are similar.

I also warned them that the recent series of press interviews which they had given in order to put us under pressure represented nothing except propaganda, and that they had to choose between propaganda and negotiations.

Thuy, who had probably come prepared for some complaint from us, replied first with a series of grab-bag charges that we were exerting military pressure against them, but he was careful not to overstate his case and to stress their desire to settle.

Tho followed up with a brief presentation in which he did what he had probably planned to do later in the meeting; as evidence of their sincere desire to settle he listed the areas of agreements between their points and ours.

Tho said that we agreed in principle on a number of points, even though details remained to be settled, and specifically said we agreed on international supervision and on international guarantees. He also said we agreed on a cease-fire, although we differed on when it should come into effect. He said we did not agree on other issues, but we were making an effort.

He stressed that their points went much further than Madame Binh's and covered *all* of Indochina, not just South Vietnam.

I replied to Thuy's charges regarding our military actions by citing their recent build-up in the DMZ area, and recalled the 1968 "understanding." I then read my prepared statement, also listing areas of agreement. I said we agreed in principle on a number of points, although details had to be worked out. I said we were prepared to have a large aid program after the war but would not pay reparations. I also stated that we would not accept their demand that we replace Thieu but would agree to define our relationship with any government existing in Saigon. I did not give them a date, but said this would be the first item of business once we had agreed on a framework for a settlement.

After a very lengthy break, they made their concluding statements, in which they asked a few questions about our position and stressed at some length their desire to have us get rid of Thieu.

We then agreed to review our respective positions and to meet again on 7/26.⁶

⁵ The word "nine" was not included in the version given to Rogers.

⁶ Kissinger sent a brief summary of the memorandum to Bunker in backchannel message WHS 1068, July 17, and promised to give him a full transcript. He instructed Bunker to inform Thieu. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 853, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. IX)

234. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, July 14, 1971.

SUBJECT

My Talks with Chou En-lai

[Omitted here is material unrelated to Vietnam.]

*Indochina*²

Chou En-lai was as forthcoming as we could have hoped. His attitude throughout reflected the ambivalence of Peking's position. For ideological reasons, he clearly had to support Hanoi. On the other hand, it was apparent that he did not wish to jeopardize the chances for an improvement in our relations, especially after I explained the positions we had taken in Paris and warned of the danger of escalation if negotiations failed. He came back to this latter point again and again, without threat or bluster, simply using it as an argument for the desirability of peace.

Thus Chou went back and forth between a formal theoretical defense of Hanoi's position (though in much lower key than Le Duc Tho at Paris) and concrete questions that sought to discover areas of agreement. He stressed Peking's support of Hanoi while insisting that there had not been advisers in Indochina nor would there be. He criticized American aggression but stressed Chinese interest in an "honorable exit" for the US.

From the outset, I linked the Indochina conflict and our relations with Peking:

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1032, Files for the President, China Materials, Polo I, Record. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Printed from an unsigned copy. Other portions of the memorandum are printed in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XVII, China, 1969–1972, Document 144. Kissinger met with Chou En-lai on July 9 and 10. The memoranda of conversation of these meetings are printed in full *ibid.*, Documents 139–141 and 143.

² In a July 1 meeting with Haig and Kissinger before the trip to Beijing, Nixon instructed Kissinger to emphasize three fears in his discussions with the Chinese, the first of which was their "fears of what the President might do in the event of continued stalemate in the South Vietnam war." He also listed progress in the war as one of his four preconditions for agreeing to a summit and wanted Kissinger to remind them that if the war were settled the United States could remove 6,000 troops from Taiwan. (Memorandum for the President's File, July 1; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Geopolitical Files—China, China Trips, July 1971 Briefing Notebook)

—I pointed out that two-thirds of our forces in Taiwan were linked to the war and their removal would depend on an end of the conflict.

—I also pointed out that an end to the war would accelerate the improvement in our relationship.

In addition, I reviewed the current situation in Paris and pointed out that the talks were blocked because of Hanoi's insistence on the overthrow of Thieu and its refusal to agree to a ceasefire. I warned that a breakdown in the negotiations would mean continuation of the war, with incalculable consequences.

Chou addressed Indochina several times during the first two days of our talks.

On the first day he asked a number of questions about our position, generally in an intelligent and sympathetic manner. These were:

—Were we really ready to pull out?

—Would we close all our bases?

—Why would we wish to leave a "tail," such as some advisers and/or the Thieu Government?

—Would we be prepared to accept having the Indochinese people determine their own future?

—Why did we wish a cease-fire?

—Would we wish to continue giving aid to the present government?

It was clear that he understood the linkage between Taiwan and Vietnam and did not object to it. He also was extremely concerned about the possibility of escalation. In addition, he made the following points:

—He revealed that he had not been informed about the secret meetings we had had with the North Vietnamese in Paris recently.

—He said that China only had two objectives with regard to a Vietnam settlement:

- There must be a withdrawal of US and Allied forces.
- The peoples of the three Indochinese countries must be left to decide their own future.

—He insisted that China would keep hands off after a settlement.

On the second day Chou took a harder line. As part of a generally tough presentation, he attacked the Thieu and Lon Nol Governments and he charged us with having committed "aggression" in Indochina since World War II. He warned that we should pull out completely and not leave a "tail" behind in the form of advisers since these would be the entering wedge for a new involvement.

He warned about the dangers of escalation but also made clear that China would not intervene. He explained several times that Chinese assistance to Hanoi had never included combat forces—there

had only been some bridgebuilding and road repair crews during the bombing.³

He stressed that there were no Chinese advisors in Indochina nor would there be.

The morning of our departure, without prompting, Chou returned to Indochina in an astonishingly sympathetic and open manner. He made the following points:

—He hoped our negotiations in Paris would be successful and he wished me luck.

—He would talk to Hanoi after the announcement of the President's visit to Peking had been made.

—Peking supports Mme. Binh's seven point proposal but they were negotiable.

—He hopes our withdrawal will be complete, thorough and honorable.

—He thought that we would find Hanoi more generous than we believed.

This means he will talk to the North Vietnamese and may be able to exert some influence. The mere fact of his talking to them is likely to compound the shock of your announced visit to Peking. In any case, he knows that the very fact that we and Peking are moving closer will have an impact in Hanoi.

[Omitted here is material unrelated to Vietnam.]

³ In an October 18 memorandum to Laird, Carver provided him with CIA data on Communist military aid to the DRV, noting that while both the Soviet Union and PRC had reduced their support since it peaked in 1967, in 1970 the PRC provided \$53 million and the Soviets provided \$49 million. It was the first time the PRC surpassed the Soviets, but this was because the DRV was requesting more of the types of aid that the PRC provided. The aid did not include combat personnel. (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330-76-197, Box 88, Viet (North) 091.3)

235. Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Senior Review Group¹

Washington, July 22, 1971, 2:35–3:40 p.m.

SUBJECT

Cease-Fire

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

Mr. U. Alexis Johnson

Mr. William Sullivan

Mr. Arthur Hartman

Defense

Mr. David Packard

Mr. Armistead Selden

Mr. Clayton E. McManaway

Mr. Dennis J. Doolin

Mr. Frederick D. Leutner

JCS

Admiral Thomas H. Moorer

Brig. Gen. William C. Burrows

Lt. Col. Paul Donovan

CIA

Mr. Richard Helms

Mr. George Carver

NSC Staff

Col. Richard T. Kennedy

Mr. Wayne Smith

Mr. W.R. Smyser

Mr. Robert Sansom

Mr. John Negroponte

Adm. Robert Welander

Mr. Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—the Cease-Fire Terms Paper² would be sent to the field for comment, with responses due by August 6.

The Vietnam Working Group will start preparing a summary paper of cease-fire alternatives for the President, to include:

—field comments on the basic inter-agency cease-fire paper;

—a more detailed analysis of the composition and role of an international supervisory body, based on a State Department paper on this subject;³

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-112, SRG Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House.

² The paper, which Kissinger requested on October 16, 1970, was prepared by the VSSG on June 10. (Ibid., Box H-55, SRG Meetings, Ceasefire 7/22/71, 1 of 2)

³ Sullivan described the paper briefly during the meeting. He explained that the optimum supervisory body would be composed of police-type units from Japan, Indonesia, and Malaysia and range in size from 6,000 to 18,000 men. The minimum the administration could accept would be the current International Control Commission, assuming good U.S. intelligence. A copy of the paper is *ibid.*

—a discussion of the change in resources or the added security measures the GVN will have to take to protect itself against terrorism and harassment under cease-fire conditions;

—an estimate of the probable outcome of the struggle for control of the contested 32% of the population;

—an estimate of how quickly the enemy could conduct a buildup under the cease-fire conditions which would give him the offensive capabilities projected in the CIA timetable, and an estimate of what the enemy supply throughput would have to be in order to meet the CIA timetable.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

236. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Paris, July 26, 1971, 10:30 a.m.–4 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Le Duc Tho, Adviser to the North Vietnamese Delegation
Xuan Thuy, Chief of North Vietnamese Delegation
Vo Van Sung, North Vietnamese Delegate General in Paris
Phan Hien² of North Vietnamese Delegation
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
Winston Lord, NSC Staff
David R. Halperin, NSC Staff

Kissinger: I was afraid you would try and take a vote by majority so I brought an extra colleague along with me. (Mr. Halperin)

Le Duc Tho: Anyway, we have a majority.

Kissinger: I have never won an argument with my colleague.

Xuan Thuy: What shall we do now?

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1039, Files for the President, Vietnam Negotiations, HAK II 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting took place at the North Vietnamese Residence in Paris, 11 Rue Darthe.

² Nguyen Minh Vy's name was crossed out and Phan Hien's was written in.

Kissinger: Mr. Minister, we used to alternate, and I made the opening statement last time. Perhaps you would like to speak first today.

Xuan Thuy: If you would like to follow this order, then I shall take the floor now.

Kissinger: Thank you very much.

Xuan Thuy: We have carefully studied the views expressed by Mr. Special Adviser during the last meeting.³ The last time Mr. Special Adviser based himself on our 9 points to speak about his 7 points, and to combine both systems. Today I will follow the same method.

Mr. Special Adviser, speaking of our 9 points you said you agreed in principle to our point one. But you did not mention any time limit for complete withdrawal of U.S. forces and the forces of other countries from South Vietnam and other countries of Indochina.

Kissinger: I also said I thought the Minister was a little optimistic. But I won't interrupt.

Xuan Thuy: And you said only after an agreement was reached on a framework would you set a date for the withdrawal. If so, it will take time and no settlement would be rapidly reached.

We said that total withdrawal of U.S. forces and the forces of other foreign countries from South Vietnam and other Indochina countries should be completed by the end of 1971. In your reply you made no mention of that.

Regarding Point 2, we have made a step to meet . . .

Kissinger: Which Point 2, yours or ours?

Xuan Thuy: Our Point 2 . . . to meet your request on prisoners. This shows our good will. You said you agreed in principle and were prepared to mention a few more ideas. We shall consider your request. In our view, we feel no difficulty about the views you wanted to add.

Regarding our Point 3. On the one hand, you said it would be contrary to U.S. principles, and a betrayal of the people who had been working with the U.S. for a long time. Therefore we would like to ask, do you refuse to change the present Saigon administration headed by Nguyen Van Thieu?

On the other hand, you said that you agree with Point 3 if it means that the U.S. should refrain from political intervention in South Vietnam. The last time you said that the U.S. affirmed that it would not support any Presidential candidate in the forthcoming election. But the Saigon press and public opinion say that by furnishing the Saigon Administration with arms, in practice the U.S. is supporting Nguyen Van Thieu, although it says it is neutral in the forthcoming election.

³ See Document 233.

Kissinger: One point. I'm not arguing but just wanted to understand. Is this what the Saigon press is saying or what you are saying?

Xuan Thuy: I mean that the Saigon press and public opinion says that after aiding the Nguyen Van Thieu machinery, if now the U.S. said it will be neutral in the forthcoming elections, in practice it will be supporting Thieu.

In practice it is our view also.

And in your seven points you made no mention about the Saigon Administration. It is not a separate part of your proposal.

In our view, we think that if this question is not mentioned in your program, if this question is not clearly stated in our discussion, then the subjects of our discussion, political and military questions, are not clearly reflected in our discussion, and if so our discussions cannot make rapid progress. If so we will be faced with more difficulties, and the question of South Vietnam will not be settled.

Last time, Mr. Special Adviser, you said you would carefully consider this question and by the next session, which is today, you would express your views. I would expect to hear from you later.

Kissinger: That is mutual.

Xuan Thuy: With regard to Point 5, you said that it would be not difficult for you to agree in principle with it, but you would like to see another formulation. We shall consider this view, this question. We shall discuss and try to express the facts, history, reason.

Kissinger: I think if we can concentrate on reason and go easy on history, we will make more progress.

Xuan Thuy: Both are important, because history and reason are linked.

In Point 6, we have shown our good will in a reasonable proposal for the settlement of problems concerning the Indochinese countries. Mr. Special Adviser you proposed that we should remove the last sentence of our proposal. I do not understand yet the reason for your request, but we shall discuss that.

Regarding our Point 7, you said that you agreed in principle. You said that once agreement is reached on the above Point 6, then a cease-fire should be agreed. You proposed to add a few more ideas. I think your request could be considered.

Moreover, Mr. Special Adviser said the last time that Point 4 and Point 5 of the seven points of the PRG could be agreed upon. We have no objection to that.

Kissinger: You mean you accept your own points.

Xuan Thuy: You said last time . . .

Kissinger: We said they could be considered.

Xuan Thuy: As to our Point 8 and our Point 9, you said that you agreed to them. I have nothing to add. When the time comes, we shall discuss these points in detail.

As for our Point 4, our views have been clearly expressed in Point 4 of the 9 points. We have clearly stated the responsibility of the United States for the loss of human life and property caused during the war in both North and South Vietnam.

You want to raise the question of aid. We shall consider your views.

After considering our views and your views expressed at the last meeting, here is the conclusion we have come to:

We have made some progress in the sense that we have agreed to take our 9 points and your 7 points as the basis for discussion. However, there are two crucial points on which your views are not clear yet.

The first crucial point is the question of troop withdrawal. You said that you agreed to the principle of U.S. troop withdrawal linked with the question of prisoners. The two operations begin on the same date and end on the same date. But what is important is a date on which U.S. troop withdrawal would be completed. You have not been clear, you have not mentioned that point.

As for us, we have been clear in saying that the troop withdrawal from South Vietnam and other Indochinese countries should be completed by 1971.

The second crucial question is the question of power in South Vietnam. We have been clear in saying that you should change the present ruling group headed by Nguyen Van Thieu. As for you, this question of power in South Vietnam is not one point among your 7 points. Moreover, the views you expressed last time were not clear.

Now you said we should agree on a framework, but these two questions are not included in the framework. These two questions are the spinal cord of the framework.

Le Duc Tho: What is a framework without a spinal cord?

Kissinger: I think the Special Adviser did some drafting here.

Le Duc Tho: A framework without spinal bones would collapse.

Xuan Thuy: We have made a big step forward by proposing 9 points. We have shown great flexibility by meeting your request on prisoners. We have raised one important question that we should settle, not only the question of Vietnam, but also the question of Indochina. We have expressed our desire to find a reasonable, logical, lasting settlement for the whole region of Indochina so that this region will become peaceful, independent, and stable. We have also expressed our desire that after the war and the restoration of peace, our two countries would establish a new relationship in the interest of both Vietnam and the United States.

Such are our views. I hope that today we will be able to clarify the crucial points we have raised. I expect now to listen to you, Mr. Special Adviser. Before that, I would like to give the floor to Mr. Special Adviser Le Duc Tho.

Kissinger: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Le Duc Tho: Minister Xuan Thuy has just expressed his comments on your views regarding the framework. I have a few words to add.

I have made a broad retrospective view to see your interests, how you want to settle the Vietnam problem, and how you pose the questions for settlement. Also, how we have posed the questions for a Vietnam settlement, and to see what you and we should do to settle the Vietnam problem, the question of the war in Indochina.

Then I have seen that for so many years the U.S. has been interfering too deeply in the war of Vietnam and Indochina. And in the process you have met with many setbacks and you are faced now with many difficulties in settling the Vietnam problem and the Indochina problem.

We realize that you are now desiring to extricate yourself from the war in Vietnam and Indochina, but we think you are calculating the best way to withdraw from the war. According to your calculations, you want to withdraw by two ways. First, by negotiations. Second, by Vietnamization of the war. These two ways mutually assist each other.

By Vietnamization of the war you want to maintain in South Vietnam a strong army and a strong Administration so as to negotiate.

And in the negotiations you want also to negotiate in such a way that will ensure the Vietnamization of the war.

So if a settlement is reached, you will have strong power in South Vietnam that will enable you to continue the implementation of your neo-colonialist policy. But if no success is brought by negotiations, you will devote your efforts to Vietnamization to reach your purpose, to turn South Vietnam into a neo-colony.

Such are your aims, and in view of these aims, you pose the problems so as to reach these aims. That is the reason why, during so many meetings we have had up to now, your intention is always to separate the military problems from the political problems of South Vietnam.

You only want to settle the military problems and you do not want to settle the political problems, so as to maintain the Nguyen Van Thieu Administration as an instrument of Vietnamization policy. That is the reason why you try to elude discussion of this question. You only pay attention to military questions.

In settling the military question, your aim is to be able to withdraw very slowly. Then you will withdraw so that either by negotia-

tions or other means you will be able to maintain the Thieu Administration. Your aim is to keep the Thieu Administration in office.

Therefore we have made the proposal about the withdrawal of troops linked to the release of prisoners and after several meetings you are still not able to set a time limit for withdrawals, and you put conditions for setting a time limit.

Now you propose your 7 points, and you say that agreement should be reached on the framework. This reflects your interest in separating military questions from political questions. You proposed a framework and we said that we would consider the framework you proposed. Now after consideration we think you have agreed to points which are advantageous to you. For instance, Point 4 and Point 5 of the PRG proposal, Point 8 and Point 9 of our 9 points are agreed upon by you because these points are to your advantage. Therefore you agree to them very rapidly.

The alterations prepared by you to points are also motivated to give you advantage, for instance Point 4, Point 5, Point 6, Point 7.

But there are two crucial points mentioned by Minister Xuan Thuy as the spinal bone of the framework which you place outside of the framework.

In a word, the points you agree to and the points for which you have proposed alterations are of secondary importance, but as to the two crucial points your way of posing the problem differs from ours.

In these points there is a certain flexibility on your part. That is, you have withdrawn the two months time for release of prisoners before the complete troop withdrawal.

As we have said, we have made some progress, but the progress we have made concerns very small points, very secondary points. As to the points on which we have not agreed, they are the crucial points.

You say you want to make rapid progress. We too say we want to make rapid progress. But your way of posing the problem will lead to very slow progress. There is a contradiction between your desire to make rapid progress toward a settlement and your aims, your goals. You want a rapid settlement but your desires, your ambitions, are great. So there is a contradiction that hampers a settlement because your concessions are in dribblets. They are in a very small quantity. If I can say here in an imaginative way, the proposals, the concessions you are making here in dribblets are comparable to your troop withdrawals in dribblets.

If we now compare our nine points and the seven points of the PRG, with a great deal of precision and detail, with your seven points, there is a great deal of difference. We can say that our proposals have been made in a spirit and context showing great flexibility, logic, and reason.

Kissinger: You don't think the Special Adviser could be a little prejudiced?

Le Duc Tho: This is very objective, not prejudiced at all.

Because to the seven points proposed by the PRG there is no objection. Even you cannot object.

Kissinger: I think I could develop some objections if I try.

Le Duc Tho: Objectively you can't.

So our proposals are aimed at reaching a settlement for the whole of the problem, to bring about a serious and good-willed discussion on both the military question and the political question, both to the Vietnam questions and the Indochina questions. Only in such a way can we really put an end to the war.

We agree with you that we should first agree on a general framework, and starting with this general framework we should go point by point into details. The general framework should be agreeable to both sides.

But to reach an agreement on a general framework, first we agree on the two principal points, Points 1 and 3. If we agree in principle on these two questions, then other questions can be settled easily. Because we have agreed in principle on Points 8 and 9 of our proposal and on Points 4 and 5 of the PRG. Minister Xuan Thuy said we would consider Points 4, 5, 6, and 7. These points are secondary points.

Kissinger: Our points.

Le Duc Tho: Your views on Points 4, 5, 6, and 7 of our proposal. But these points are secondary points. If we can settle the two principal questions, the military and the political, the settlement of the other points will be easy.

Now I would like to know whether you agree to this way of discussion, both military and political, and to reach a settlement, because these two questions are the spinal bone of the framework. Without the spinal bone, the framework will collapse.

I would like to ask you another question. What is the way of negotiating now to settle the problem, the whole of the problems?

Now there is a final idea I would like to explain to you.

You are faced with many difficulties in Indochina. You want to get out of these difficulties. The last few years you have been trying to go here and there to seek a way out. I don't know whether you have drawn experience from this, because I think your efforts are vain. I think you make the problem more complicated for yourself, because you don't get the results you expect. There is no magical way to settle the problem of Vietnam outside of serious negotiations here in Paris on the basis of our proposals and your proposals.

In the game of chess, the decisive party to win or lose the game is the participant. There is no other way.

In settling our problems we have been independent the last few years. If you really want serious negotiations, I think you should not engage in these magical ways. I think you should engage in serious negotiations. We are prepared to discuss things with you. We should not be tortuous.

These are the views I express to you today. If you do not want to settle problems and don't want to meet our requests then it is difficult for our negotiations to be successful. And if the negotiations do not succeed, then the war will continue.

I believe you do not want such a state of things. We do not want it either. But if you do not want to negotiate seriously, we have no other way.

If the war continues, we are firmly confident in our success, in our victory. Because the socialist countries will continue to aid and support our peoples' struggle. And we shall continue to unite with socialist countries in our struggle, with the world's peoples in our struggle and our just cause will win. There is nothing which can alter the course of history.

I have finished.

Kissinger: I appreciate the remarks of the Minister and of the Special Adviser, which were, for the most part, constructive and put forward in a positive spirit.

Now, let me first ask some questions and then I will make some observations.

The Minister said on a number of our points that he would consider them. I don't understand what that phrase means. Does that mean he will consider them positively or negatively?

Xuan Thuy: Positively.

Kissinger: The Minister said with respect to a number of points that he would consider our proposals. Our experience is that you trade a concession on our part for consideration on your part. We want to make sure we get an agreement.

Xuan Thuy: (laughs) Our line is always to follow a positive discussion to settle the Vietnam problem.

Kissinger: I won't pursue the point, but I want to point out that my first experience with these talks was in 1967, when we were told that certain actions on our part would lead to constructive talks and discussions. Here we are in 1971. I want to make sure that when Minister Xuan Thuy considers these things, that will not take us until 1975, when you come to a decision.

Xuan Thuy: If our discussions here have not had rapid results, it is due to you.

For instance, we demanded that the bombing of North Vietnam should be completely stopped before we discussed all other questions. If the U.S. Government had agreed to this request very rapidly, we would have settled rapidly, but the U.S. Government took over five months to agree to the very same points that were put at the beginning of negotiations.

A second example, is when we began the four party conference. Our consistent demand was that we should discuss both military and political questions. But you eluded discussing these two questions, and so we have been for over two years now.

A third example is on the question of POW's. This is a question of the aftermath of the war, the consequence of war. But we are prepared to settle problems if we can come to an agreement on the military and political questions. The question of prisoners is not difficult at all.

But you want to use the question to overshadow the other questions and therefore the negotiations are protracted. And now we have shown clearly the good will in this question of prisoners, but you refuse to discuss military and political questions, you refuse to set a date for troop withdrawal, you refuse to give up the Saigon Administration, and you don't want to discuss the question of the Administration in South Vietnam.

Le Duc Tho: I want to add one observation. Mr. Harriman, after his participation in the talks here, he went back. I have read a translation of what he has written. Harriman shows the experience on settling the question of stopping the bombing. I believe you have read the book too. And I think Mr. Special Adviser should learn lessons from Mr. Harriman and not follow the same way as he.

Kissinger: I am certain that once I am out of office, all questions will seem as easy for me as they now are for Mr. Harriman.

Xuan Thuy: Anyhow, you can draw some experience from that.

Kissinger: I hope for both of us that I may draw it before I leave office. We do not want to wait six years before settling the war. Let me ask another question.

The Minister said with respect to his Point 2, that he would consider our request of clarifications on the release of prisoners. Does that mean that he will consider furnishing a list on the day agreement is reached and that prisoners throughout Indochina will be released?

Xuan Thuy: Regarding our Point 2 of our nine points. Mr. Special Adviser last time requested that we put some more detail. I say now we should consider these additional matters. That means that after we agree on a terminal date for troop withdrawal, we can then consider the question of furnishing a list of military men and civilians captured during the war.

Regarding the question of prisoners throughout Indochina, I have told the Special Adviser that concerning the Indochina questions we shall reach agreement here and we shall exchange views with our respective allies.

Kissinger: What is your judgment about your degree of influence with your allies? On this point, I have great confidence in your persuasive power.

Xuan Thuy: I have only repeated your views expressed the other day. I agree to your views.

Kissinger: One final question. I have noticed that our Point 2 has disappeared from the discussion of my colleagues.

Xuan Thuy: Is that the one regarding outside forces?

Kissinger: Yes.

Le Duc Tho: You should give an answer to my question, do you agree to the way of posing the problems and of discussing the problems, do you agree to reach agreement on the two crucial questions and then we will discuss this issue. You should answer that.

Kissinger: I'll answer that. I am entitled to an answer from the Minister on my question, since I always answer his questions.

Xuan Thuy: I think in your Point 2 you raise the question of mutual withdrawals. But previously you said you would not put on the same legal footing U.S. forces and the Vietnamese people fighting against aggression. We made remarks on your point, and now you put the question again.

Kissinger: We have agreed that it should be discussed in another forum, but we want to know if you agree in principle that the forces of North Vietnam should remain within the frontiers of North Vietnam like the forces of others will do.

Le Duc Tho: This question cannot be put in such a way. We have put the problem in our Point 6. (Le Duc Tho at this point reads their Point 6.) We do not pose the question as you do. And I cannot give an answer to your question to settle this problem since you have not fixed any date for withdrawal and you have not answered our Point 3 about maintaining the Thieu Administration.

Kissinger: One final question, and then I will reply to my two opposite numbers.

The last time, when the Special Adviser made his eloquent speech, he talked about replacing Thieu. Now he keeps talking about the Thieu Administration. Has there been a change in position?

Le Duc Tho: There is no change in our position at all, because when we speak of the change of Nguyen Van Thieu or the Thieu Administration, we do not mean the change of person but of the policy. Because even now if you change the person, and not change the policy, if there's

the same policy of war, bellicose, dictatorial, fascist, there's no change at all. We speak of Thieu because he symbolizes and embodies this war-like and fascist policy.

Kissinger: Let me reverse the question. Suppose Thieu changed his policy. Would you accept him? If it is not a question of persons.

Le Duc Tho: With a person like Nguyen Van Thieu, I don't think that he can change his policy overnight. There should be another person with another policy.

This policy has been opposed by the population in South Vietnamese cities and towns for many years now. This policy is reflected in the person of Nguyen Van Thieu.

Kissinger: So as soon as he leaves, you will go back to your request for a government of national concord?

Le Duc Tho: After the formation of a new administration favoring peace, independence, and neutrality, this new administration will enter into serious negotiations with the PRG regarding all military and political questions, including those raised by the PRG. As I told you the other time, if this change is brought about, then we will seriously, rapidly, logically, and reasonably settle the problem.

Kissinger: But I am not sure what change the Special Adviser wants. What should the government look like?

Le Duc Tho: As I told you the other time, we request a change of person and of policy. Because if you change only the person, and the policy is the same there is no change at all. But if you keep Thieu with such a person no change of policy is possible. Even if you affirm such a policy is changed, the people of South Vietnam will not believe it.

Kissinger: I have the answer to my question. Now let me make a few observations.

At the end of his presentation, the Special Adviser asked me two questions. First, in what way we thought of settling the problem. Second, whether we agree to discuss military and political questions together. I shall save the first question to the end of my presentation.

With respect to the second question, we discussed at our last meeting the nine and the seven points. I have acquired the impression that your Point 3 is a political point.

I am prepared to state formally that we are prepared to discuss Point 1 and Point 3, as part of a final settlement that includes all other parts.

And therefore, the answer to your question is that we are prepared to discuss political questions, although our answer is not the same as yours.

Mr. Special Adviser has made an analysis of our strategy in pursuing the war and the negotiations. Since I do not pursue the same tac-

tic as Mr. Special Adviser and the Minister of never approving anything the other side says, I have to admit that it was a very intelligent analysis.

Le Duc Tho: Because it concerns the facts.

Kissinger: He never quits while he's ahead.

By the same token, I believe that the strategy of the Minister and the Special Adviser is to bring about two results: to get us to withdraw our troops as quickly as possible, and by this method or otherwise, to change the government in Saigon.

In other words, the Special Adviser is proposing to us not that we make a compromise, but that we hand Hanoi its objective as part of a settlement.

I respect this tactic, but it is not possible to get this in these negotiations. We must both be realistic. Neither of us will sign an agreement which hands to the other all of its objectives. You say you prefer to continue the war to accepting conditions which you consider unreasonable.

We will continue the strategy which the Special Adviser very correctly described if we cannot get a reasonable and rapid negotiated settlement.

We are prepared to make compromises, and we genuinely want a rapid settlement.

But if you continue to call reasonable the acceptance of your proposals and if you consider it a concession simply to discuss our points, then there will be no solution, rapid or otherwise, and we might as well be realistic.

If you are not willing to compromise, you will have to fight for what it is you want. And then we shall see what the consequences are. There is no sense boasting on either side.

Now let me turn to your points.

I owe you an answer to Points 1, 3, and 4.

On Point 4, it is the easiest, and I will therefore take it first.

I told the Minister the last time I was here that I would study in Washington what is possible in the field of economic aid. The President is prepared, upon signature of an agreement in principle, to go to the Congress and to recommend to the Congress a five-year program of assistance for all the countries of Indochina.

The sum he is prepared to recommend to Congress is about seven and a half billion dollars over a five-year period, of which two to two and a half billion dollars would be dedicated to North Vietnam.

The question of repayment would not be a problem. Over two-thirds of the funds would be in outright grants. The remainder would

be in very long term, very low interest rate loans which pose no practical problems of repayment. Even that is adjustable.

There would be no conditions attached to this assistance program.

We propose this as a sign of our desire to start a new relationship with the people of Indochina and especially with the people of North Vietnam.

Now as to Point 1.

We are prepared to fix a date for the withdrawal of all our forces as well as the forces allied with us, to be completed nine months after the signature of an agreement.

Now let me turn to Point 3 of yours. If the Special Adviser would prefer to discuss our Point 3, I would be prepared to do that too. I agree that Point 3 is the crucial problem for your side.

What you are asking us is to replace the Administration in Saigon, and to substitute for it an administration which you consider peaceful by your special definition, and therefore to bring about the objectives that you have fought for by our actions.

We have told you on innumerable occasions that we cannot do this because it is beyond our power to do it, and because it would be dishonorable to do it.

You cannot expect us both to withdraw from Vietnam rapidly and to do all your political work for you.

If these are your last words, we will withdraw at our own pace, and you will have to do your own political work. We have shown our good will, both by the proposals we have made with respect to Point 4 and by the proposals we have made with respect to Point 1, and I will now give you some observations on Point 3 in addition.

We have told you on innumerable occasions that we are prepared to accept the outcome of any political process which develops after our departure.

We believe that our withdrawal will have certain consequences, as you yourselves have repeatedly pointed out.

Le Duc Tho: Please be more precise on the last point. (At this point he repeats a certain passage of what Dr. Kissinger said and Dr. Kissinger repeats the passage for Le Duc Tho.)

Dr. Kissinger: Since the Minister and the Special Adviser have pointed out to me at each of our nine meetings that the Saigon Administration is maintained by our forces, then the withdrawal of our forces must have certain consequences.

Secondly, we believe that the announcement of our withdrawal will have consequences of a major political nature even before the withdrawal is completed.

We believe that our readiness to accept some of the elements of Point 5 of Mme. Binh's proposals, specifically the provisions for neutrality, will have major political consequences in South Vietnam. We believe that an announcement of our readiness to accept certain limitations on our military assistance to the government in South Vietnam will have major political consequences, first when it is announced and then when it happens.

We believe that a declaration of total neutrality on our part in any political contest in South Vietnam will have a major political impact both when it is announced and when it is carried out.

We are prepared to make all these declarations and we are prepared to carry them out scrupulously as part of a settlement.

In short, we are willing, insofar as this is now in our power, to undo those distortions of the South Vietnamese political life that our presence and interference may have provoked.

We are not prepared to take an active part in bringing about the solution you wish. We want the people of Vietnam to be genuinely free to choose their own future.

So the choice is up to you. We are prepared to make a settlement rapidly.

Le Duc Tho: (interrupting) Please repeat your last sentence.

Dr. Kissinger: (repeats the sentence) Do you understand. I don't want you to fight among yourselves.

Le Duc Tho: What do you mean by "distortions"?

Dr. Kissinger: To the extent to which our presence and our even unintentional intervention helps one candidate or another.

Le Duc Tho: That is clear.

Dr. Kissinger: So the choice is up to you.

We can make a rapid settlement, in which case the political process would start sooner, or we can continue the war for a while, in which case the best you can expect is to have the political process begin later which we are prepared to start now.

By the Special Adviser's own analysis, after our unilateral withdrawal is complete and after Vietnamization is complete, no matter what you do, we will not be able to fulfill the conditions of what you ask, under Point 3.

We do not want a neocolonialist position in Vietnam. We are not changing our foreign policy and withdrawing forces from all over the world in order to maintain a colonial position in this little corner.

Vietnam is your only problem. It is only one of many for us. We would like to bring it into its proper perspective.

Over an historic period, I repeat, we are no threat to your independence. There are many other countries, including some much closer to you, which are much better candidates for that.

As we made clear in our response to Point 4, we want a relationship of cooperation and ultimately friendship with all the people of Indochina and particularly the people of North Vietnam.

We know we have to settle the war in Paris if it is to be settled by negotiations. We respect and admire the spirit of independence which you have shown and which we do not expect you to give up at this stage, and which we do not want you to give up.

We have to travel on many roads, some of which will appear tortuous to you, not all of which are related to your future or to our discussion here.

We will not seek solutions in other places except here. It is in this spirit that I would like to answer the first question of the Special Adviser, which way do we proceed from here?

Le Duc Tho: My question is how do we proceed from here.

Dr. Kissinger: That is what I was now going to answer. I would like to make a specific practical proposal, unless the Special Adviser thinks it is no use after hearing me.

Le Duc Tho: Please.

Dr. Kissinger: My specific proposal is this. We have two categories of issues. Issues of principle and issues of technical detail.

I believe that for the technical issues, this forum takes too long and can meet too infrequently.

I therefore propose, but I am open to suggestions, that if we continue these negotiations, that we agree here on a statement of principles in considerable detail, and that we give those principles to our delegations at Avenue Kleber that they work on the details there. If there is any deadlock, we can meet again to try to resolve it.

These are all of the remarks I want to make today.

Could I ask the Special Adviser a personal question?

Le Duc Tho: Please.

Dr. Kissinger: In what language did he read Harriman's book?

Le Duc Tho: In translation. In Vietnamese. (The interpreter said that he had translated it for the Special Adviser.)

Dr. Kissinger: I would put up with the Special Adviser knowing French, but if he also understands English it is too much because that gives him three cracks at my remarks. I don't want to give him too many advantages.

Le Duc Tho: But you have full time for thinking about what we have been saying. Anyway, deep thinking is necessary.

I propose now a little break.

(At this point a break was taken which lasted about an hour. During the first fifteen minutes or so Le Duc Tho met with Kissinger on the balcony for a relatively informal chat. Dr. Kissinger made a brief allusion to his stay in China by saying that when he returned from his trip he had gained a great deal of weight. Le Duc Tho did not open up this area for discussion any further. Le Duc Tho again expressed his assumption that the CIA overthrew Sihanouk despite Kissinger's firm denial.)

Kissinger: Where are my notes? [To the Vietnamese interpreter]⁴ Have you got them?

Xuan Thuy: You are an absent-minded professor, perhaps?

Kissinger: When I invite you to Harvard you will be allowed to speak fifty minutes, the Special Adviser on history and the Minister on diplomacy.

Xuan Thuy: To speak shortly is more difficult. To speak at length we excel.

Kissinger: As Ambassador Lodge and Ambassador Bruce have found to their sorrow.

Xuan Thuy: I tell you this privately. You should not convey this to Ambassador Bruce, for if Ambassador Bruce becomes impatient, he has to leave.

Kissinger: I must tell you this now; I was going to tell you later. He is sick, with a circulatory disease, and must be replaced in the next few weeks. This is no reflection on our discussions, and is not a political act. He is seventy-four years old. His replacement will come within one or two weeks after he leaves, so there will be no problem. We will replace him with Ambassador Porter.⁵

Xuan Thuy: And Mr. Habib?

Kissinger: He will leave. He will not stay here. He is here just for transition, only a week or two.

Xuan Thuy: It is up to you.

Kissinger: I just wanted to inform you.

⁴ Brackets are in the original.

⁵ According to a May 26 memorandum of conversation with Bruce, Kissinger described his plans for the secret negotiations and asked him to stay on through June as a result. Bruce consented but indicated that his ill health would not permit him to stay any longer. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Box 106, Kissinger Office Files, Country Files, Far East, Vietnam, "S" Mister, Vol. 2) Bruce offered his resignation in a letter to Nixon, July 27, which Nixon accepted. The White House announced William J. Porter's appointment as head of the delegation to the Paris Peace Talks on July 28. (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1971*, p. 827)

Xuan Thuy: After the views expressed by Mr. Special Adviser Kissinger I would like to put a few questions and after those questions I will make a few observations.

My first question is about the total withdrawal of U.S. forces and those of other foreign countries from Vietnam and from the other countries of Indochina. I would like to ask you this for clarification. What we are asking is total withdrawal of U.S. forces, including army, navy, air force, marines, weapons, armaments, military bases, military personnel, military advisers, etc. Mr. Special Adviser refers to all U.S. forces sometimes, but here and there, for the press and in other places, there are references which are different to what we say here. Please be clear on that point, and give us more clarification on that point.

Kissinger: We propose the withdrawal of all organized military forces; all bases, purely American bases, will be given up; and the withdrawal of all advisers with combat units.

Xuan Thuy: Advisers to Saigon combat units?

Kissinger: Yes.

Xuan Thuy: You mentioned organized military forces. What do you mean by that? What about unorganized military forces?

Kissinger: I can't get away with anything.

Le Duc Tho: You've stopped me many times before.

Kissinger: No, it's a good question.

We would propose to keep a very small number of technical and logistic personnel to supervise American equipment, a number fixed in the agreement and progressively reduced.

Le Duc Tho: But all the equipment will be withdrawn. What equipment will be left?

Kissinger: We must understand what you mean by equipment. All the equipment belonging to American forces will be withdrawn, not material that belongs to South Vietnamese forces.

Le Duc Tho: But you propose to leave behind technical and logistic personnel to supervise American equipment. Since equipment belonging to American forces will be withdrawn, what equipment will there be to supervise?

Kissinger: There are two things. First, these personnel would help for a limited time to maintain and train Vietnamese personnel in the technical aspects of complex equipment of South Vietnamese units. Second, they would supervise distribution of whatever new equipment would be permitted in the agreement.

We are talking here of very small numbers; we are not talking about tens of thousands. This is a number we can specify in the agreement and progressively reduce to a normal military attaché office with a slightly enlarged function.

Xuan Thuy: In the office of the U.S. military attaché in the U.S. Embassy?

Kissinger: Yes. As is the normal case.

Xuan Thuy: You say that it will be in the normal military attaché office with a function a little enlarged. What will be the number of the members in the military attaché office? Also originally, at the beginning, what number of technical and logistic advisers do you intend to leave behind?

Kissinger: I frankly have no precise numbers. We haven't studied this yet in detail. But I can tell you that it will be considerably smaller than the number of troops in the country when combat troops were sent in 1964. I would think, without giving specific figures, that the number that would be left when withdrawals are completed would be considerably less than 10,000 and would be progressively reduced thereafter. And there would not be any organized military units.⁶

Le Duc Tho: And you mentioned about the military attaché office being broadened later on. Do you mean that the functions will be broadened, and do you mean also that you will broaden the number of personnel too?

Kissinger: To give you a serious answer, I would like to do what we did on economic aid, study this question and give you an answer next time. I can say now that when that point is reached, it will be much less than 1,000. The functions will be confined to the technical equipment and would have nothing to do with combat.

Le Duc Tho: And training?

Kissinger: No. No training.

Xuan Thuy: You said they would be for training Vietnamese personnel.

Kissinger: It would be for maintaining equipment, not for combat purposes. We could agree to end the training function for everything, say a year after the total withdrawal of U.S. forces.

Xuan Thuy: You have finished?

⁶ Laird sent a July 30 memorandum to Kissinger in response to his request for a "close-hold" study of leaving a residual force of 9,000 by spring 1972 and 6,000 by spring 1973. Laird wrote that he assumed that none of the U.S. forces would police a cease-fire. While he did not consult Abrams, McCain, or Moorer, Laird suspected that they would object to any force below 60,000. Haig forwarded Laird's memorandum to Kissinger under a July 30 covering memorandum in which he noted that the force would emphasize logistical functions during the withdrawal of U.S. equipment and include some intelligence and communications personnel, but no combat or support forces. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 854, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. XI)

Kissinger: Yes.

Xuan Thuy: My second question is, what is the reason why you cannot set a specific date in 1971 for troop withdrawals? And you propose nine months. What is the reason?

Kissinger: First, as I recall, nine months was proposed by the Minister himself in September last year.⁷

Xuan Thuy: (Smiles) The terminal date proposed at that time for troop withdrawals was June 30, 1971, so I said roughly nine months. I said it was a terminal date. But you have no terminal date.

Kissinger: I want to have the Minister set a terminal date. All you have to do is sign an agreement and there will be a terminal date nine months later. You have an obsession with the terminal date.

Le Duc Tho: But you explain too simply.

Kissinger: I'm trying to learn, but I am a slow student. I think the Minister knows why we are doing what we are doing.

Xuan Thuy: My third question is about the political question. You said you were prepared to settle both military questions and political questions in this forum of private meetings. But when you discuss, you don't discuss political questions but only how to influence the process in South Vietnam. Therefore, when and how shall we discuss political problems? I would like to know if political problems will make up one of the items of our agenda?

Kissinger: The Minister has a very special definition of discussing political problems. His definition is that we must discuss the replacement of the existing government in Saigon. We are prepared in any agreement in principle which we make to state a number of political propositions such as neutrality, limitations on aid, and other matters. That in itself is a political discussion. As for the domestic structure in South Vietnam, we've always said we are not competent to discuss it alone.

Xuan Thuy: Mr. Special Adviser referred previously to the Indochina question. I would like to know, how do you visualize settlement of this Indochina question?

Kissinger: What does the Minister mean by the Indochina question?

Xuan Thuy: For instance the question of cease-fire, the question of prisoners in Indochina countries which you refer to. These questions are linked to military questions and political questions concerning these Indochinese countries. For instance the question of the 1962 Geneva

⁷ See Document 34.

Agreements and so on. How do you envisage that we will settle these questions?

Kissinger: We believe, first, that the political solution of each country in Indochina should be discussed first by the various parties in each country.

I believe, secondly, that this meeting here could make recommendations to the parties on some of the military issues, such as cease-fire and release of prisoners.

Thirdly, there could be an international guarantee for these various arrangements and also the provision of international supervision such as you proposed in your Points 8 and 9.

I do not believe personally, but we are open on this, that the exact membership of the Geneva Conference of 1954 is necessarily the best grouping to provide this, and we would be open to your suggestions on what countries would be best to provide international supervision and guarantees. We both have the same interests in this respect, to get a reasonable group, and I think we could agree.

Xuan Thuy: Are you finished?

Kissinger: Yes, thank you.

Le Duc Tho: I have one more question. Have I correctly understood you? The problems concerning Laos will be settled by the Laotian people themselves.

Kissinger: By the Laotian-speaking people, not the North Vietnamese-speaking people.

Xuan Thuy: Would the Laotians who speak Vietnamese well be allowed to come to these discussions?

Kissinger: That's right.

Xuan Thuy: The Cambodian problems will be settled by the Cambodian people. The Vietnamese problems will be settled by the Vietnamese people. After that settlement there will be an international conference to guarantee the agreements reached?

Kissinger: Except for those aspects here, such as cease-fire and prisoners of war and neutralization, and of course withdrawal of our forces.

Le Duc Tho: Then where will these questions be discussed?

Kissinger: Here and at Avenue Kleber for details.

Le Duc Tho: But the troop withdrawals and release of prisoners concern only South Vietnam, not the Indochinese countries.

Kissinger: As I understand the Minister and Special Adviser, they have pointed out to me that your proposal concerns all Indochina and that this is one of the big differences between your 9 points and the 7 points of Mme. Binh.

Secondly, you must understand that it is absolutely not possible to make peace unless all prisoners in Indochina are released. That is

not open to discussion. How you accomplish this is your problem, but I have great confidence in your persuasive powers.

We do not insist that the details of everything be worked out at an international conference.

Le Duc Tho: Then what will the international conference deal with?

Kissinger: Suppose we agree on a cease-fire, to give you a concrete example. The international conference would deal with the technical supervision of the cease-fire, e.g., how many teams, where they should be.

Similarly with neutrality. Suppose we agree on the neutralization of all the countries of Indochina. Then an international conference can guarantee this and recognize it.

We are not asking that an international conference work out the conditions of our arrangements.

Le Duc Tho: That is understood.

Kissinger: You see we take the Special Adviser seriously when he says that we must make peace directly. I am serious about this.

Xuan Thuy: Now I would like to speak a few words.

First, I agree with Mr. Special Adviser Kissinger on the way to conduct negotiations for a peaceful solution of Vietnamese problems. That is to say we agree to these two forums. First, this forum to discuss, to negotiate, to settle all questions of principle and a number of important details. The second forum to negotiate and settle details on the basis of the principles agreed upon.

Kissinger: I understand.

Xuan Thuy: When there is a deadlock at Kleber Street on details, we should meet again here. We hope there is no deadlock, and it goes smoothly.

Kissinger: Of course, we haven't even agreed here.

Le Duc Tho: There is a roadblock.

Xuan Thuy: Now may I make my remarks on the content of the questions to be discussed here.

Kissinger: Right.

Xuan Thuy: But I will express my remarks on principal points only, because on the other points I will speak to them later. These are preliminary remarks.

Now about the time limit for troop withdrawals. First, you say that the period of nine months is based on my view. It is not true. My view concerns a terminal date.

Kissinger: I don't want to claim too much. This was not our governing consideration.

Xuan Thuy: I've repeatedly said that when President Nixon proposed a time period of twelve months for troop withdrawals, Mr. Spe-

cial Adviser at that period mentioned twelve months and at Kleber Street the U.S. Delegation mentioned also a twelve month period. I remember when you proposed a twelve month period and then the twelve months constantly remained. But it must be fixed. You say that tomorrow here we will discuss the question. But tomorrow will remain always. It is like an advertisement in a restaurant that tomorrow you will dine free.

There should be a specific date so that you will make an effort to fulfill things at that date. Nine months is new, it is a shorter period than twelve months, but without a fixed date it is the same.

Kissinger: But if the Minister signs our 7 points today, today he has a very specific date in front of him.

Xuan Thuy: You have raised many points, and we can't sign an agreement today.

Le Duc Tho: Thus if you agree to a withdrawal date today, we will release prisoners and have an agreement.

Kissinger: There is a possibility for a greater agreement. Mr. Special Adviser will be blamed in Hanoi if he gives up 7 of his 9 points.

Le Duc Tho: We shall continue to discuss the other 7 points.

Kissinger: To be realistic, let's settle an agreement as quickly as possible, and then you have a fixed deadline and the question becomes academic.

Xuan Thuy: Another remaining issue is connected with political problems. Mr. Special Adviser endeavors to elude the substance of this question. You said that to replace Nguyen Van Thieu is beyond your power and is dishonorable. We think you have the capability to do so and are unwilling to do so. The last time we made a number of suggestions and you said you would study the suggestions, but you have not studied it.

Kissinger: Oh, I have studied it.

Xuan Thuy: Because this would be harmful to your honor to maintain Nguyen Van Thieu. On the other hand, if you replace Nguyen Van Thieu you will be welcomed by the South Vietnamese people, the American people, and world public opinion.

Moreover when doing that, we do not ask you to make a public statement. You should do that secretly. No one knows. Let you do that secretly and it will not reflect on your honor.

Kissinger: But it would become pretty obvious, don't you think?

Xuan Thuy: No one knows that. This understanding is between us only. It is not divulged.

What you have been saying shows that you will maintain Nguyen Van Thieu. Moreover if you maintain Nguyen Van Thieu, it would not only be harmful to U.S. honor, but we cannot settle the problems here.

We should settle both military questions and political questions, that is to say set a reasonable time limit for troop withdrawals and replace Nguyen Van Thieu. Because without settling these questions, though you say you want a rapid settlement, in fact the settlement will drag on and effectively we cannot reach a settlement.

Moreover, Mr. Special Adviser says that you cannot do as we have required, and that we should choose between negotiations and each side continuing its course of action, that is to say the war will continue. As a matter of fact, if we don't come to a settlement the war will continue. This is something logical, certain.

We have foreseen all eventualities. If now a negotiated settlement can be reached, reasonably and in the interest of both sides, we are prepared to do that.

Therefore, I would propose that you think over these two questions. First the military question, that is to say think over about giving a specific date for the withdrawal of all your forces, without leaving any technical personnel or military personnel. For this fact will complicate things and create new questions.

Secondly, on political problems, if you stick by the views of today this will be an obstacle to a settlement.

As for the other questions you have raised, we shall consider them, study them.

Now I give a word to Mr. Le Duc Tho.

Le Duc Tho: You have just said that you agree to discuss, settle both military and political problems. You have just said that you are prepared to discuss and settle military and political questions, but in fact these two questions have not become settled today.

Concerning troop withdrawals, Minister Xuan Thuy has spoken our basic position. I have nothing to add further.

Concerning political problems, it appears as though we have not yet discussed anything today. Looking at the other questions you have raised, you have shown that you are ready to discuss military questions only. There is no war in history that has ended only by discussing military questions. As to the political problems of South Vietnam, now you want to elude them and only settle military problems.

And we have also raised political problems concerned Indochina. Here too you want to settle military problems only. As to political problems in the Indochinese countries, you have eluded them and not expressed your views on them. Then how can we liberate prisoners throughout Indochina and how can we observe a cease-fire throughout Indochina? We participated in the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam and the 1962 Geneva Agreements on Laos. At these two conferences both military questions and political questions were settled

before we reached an agreement. If here you only discuss military problems and set apart political problems then, no settlement is possible.

Regarding the political problems of South Vietnam, we have been expressing our view at great length, and have nothing to add now, but this sentence.

You said that if you replace the Nguyen Van Thieu Administration, this will dishonor you. On the contrary, if you replace this Administration that is something which enhances your honor.

If we now review today's meeting we can see there is only one point that is different from what happened previously. You have put forward a period of nine months for the withdrawal of U.S. forces. In this connection Minister Xuan Thuy made ample remarks. It is not a fixed date, only a period. Moreover, you have raised the question of leaving behind military personnel.

In sum, you leave behind American personnel and maintain the Thieu Administration. So we can say that in the main your position has not yet changed. So I can say that in our negotiations you go forward by very small steps, and very slowly. This is not proof of your desire for a rapid settlement.

Minister Xuan Thuy and myself have made preliminary remarks today and will consider your remarks today.

Kissinger: Let me make some preliminary remarks, because it is foreseeable that at this rate we will not be getting anywhere.

If you keep pursuing the tactics of stating your demands and then judging our replies, as if we were students taking an examination, I can tell you now that there will be no agreement.

This proposition that we give you a deadline no matter what happens may impress the Special Adviser's friends at the *New York Times*, but it will not do you any good in any time period that might interest you. If we give you a fixed deadline now, and then the Special Adviser and the Minister will "consider" all other points, we will have finished our withdrawals and you will still be considering our other points while we have withdrawn. If we are going to retreat regardless of what happens, you must get used to the idea that we will do so at our own pace and one convenient for us, and apart from other issues. If you want to negotiate it, we have to settle the other terms. To retreat on a fixed deadline, we don't need agreement with you; we can do that on our own.

And we will not settle the war just for prisoners. This is another point you should have no illusions about.

Now as for the political solution. It is not correct that we have not discussed the political problem, and you know very well that it is not correct. We have offered to do a number of things which would make

it easier for the forces you support to participate in a political process and to affect the political future. We have expressed our willingness to accept neutrality for South Vietnam, to announce our withdrawals from South Vietnam, to accept limitations on military aid for South Vietnam, to declare publicly we are not supporting any particular force in South Vietnam, and to carry this out strictly. We are willing to listen to other proposals along this line.

What we cannot do is what you ask, to make a secret agreement to replace the leader of a country which is still an ally. Which would then lead to endless debate, moreover, as to what exactly a peaceful administration is, in which you have a veto because you are the only one who knows what is meant by peaceful.

So you have to decide whether you are better off after another year of war, with a further strengthened Saigon Administration and no limitations on our economic and military aid, and at the end of a year there will not be enough American forces left in South Vietnam to affect the political future. You must decide this or to make an agreement this year. I cannot tell your people which decision to make.

We are making major political concessions to you. And we are prepared to listen to proposals in this general framework that I have outlined.

I sometimes think you have learned your historical lessons too well. In 1954 you made peace with John Foster Dulles who wanted to maintain military bases. In 1971 you would make peace with an Administration which has no interest in establishing a neocolonialist government.

And if we stress military issues, it is partly because we think that after a reasonable period of time, which is short, the normal political forces of Vietnam would make themselves felt.

Now you say we should study your remarks, and we will do that. And we may be able to ease some of your concerns on the question of technical personnel. You have to decide whether an agreement in principle this summer would strengthen or weaken your political prospects in South Vietnam. I cannot hold out any prospect that we would make a secret agreement that we would overthrow the existing government in South Vietnam.

And therefore we have to decide where we are going from here. If you want to continue, you will find us within a reasonable framework to be flexible and with good will. We want to end the war. We do not want to stand in the way of the people of South Vietnam. We are not permanent enemies of Vietnam. But you must not expect us to do impossible things.

How do we go from here?

Le Duc Tho: You criticize us for following the tactic of putting forward requests and putting questions to you. But if there is something unclear, we should put forward questions for clarification, just as you have done with our proposals. We have made remarks on your proposals if there is something unclear, and you have done the same to our proposals. This is something that is normal. Actually you said that you were willing to discuss both military and political problems. But in fact your views are not yet clear. You said that we had a veto right on the South Vietnamese Administration, because we define which one is peaceful. Last time I told you that there will soon be elections in South Vietnam, and the elections are not at all democratic under the present regime. But there are candidates with programs favoring peace, independence, neutrality and democracy. The people in South Vietnam, in the cities, in the countryside, approve such a candidate. There is no reason if such a candidate wins the election that we be told how. Moreover, while it is true that you said that you would limit aid to South Vietnam, but if you maintain Nguyen Van Thieu and you maintain aid, then how will there be a peaceful settlement of the war? Because if the subsequent administration is formed, and you continue military aid to such an administration, then this will constitute continuation of the war. If both sides continue military aid, then the war will continue.

Kissinger: Are you prepared to cease all military aid?

Le Duc Tho: You are speaking of military aid to South Vietnam, so I express views to be clear on this point.

Kissinger: Excuse me. General Walters must make a call concerning my technical arrangements for the rest of the day. It will just take five minutes. We will continue and use your interpreter. We have confidence in him.

Le Duc Tho: Minister Xuan Thuy has expressed a number of views. I have expressed my views too. Both sides will study each other's remarks. If you feel we should continue discussions, then we should meet again for discussions.

Kissinger: I understand your views, but I don't understand what you expect to happen next time that didn't happen this time. I explained what is possible.

First, I have to express total disagreement with the Special Adviser's characterization. To accept limitations on military aid and neutrality for South Vietnam changes the whole political framework. As you know, President Thieu has declared against neutrality and has not accepted limitations on military aid. We are willing to accept limitations on military aid to South Vietnam that you are willing to accept for yourself. It is impossible for you to say that you will accept no limitations on military aid but that other countries should.

We believe that the conditions we have described will help the opposition to President Thieu and therefore will make it more likely that the candidate you prefer may get elected. But it is up to you to decide this. We cannot go further than that.

So we have to decide whether there is any point in continuing these meetings or whether we should stop here. I frankly don't believe that meetings in this forum will then be resumed.

Xuan Thuy: It is up to you. If we [*you?*] feel negotiations are useful, and may lead to a settlement, then we should continue. If you stick to your desire to have us do what you want, then we can't progress.

What we've been saying is well-grounded and reasonable. Because we propose a specific date for troop withdrawal; if you do not agree, you should propose one. We can discuss it.

Kissinger: The date is not the problem. The political issue is the problem.

Xuan Thuy: If there is no problem then you should propose a date and we should exchange views. Because we have proposed a date; this date is not definite or obligatory. We should exchange views and see which date is more reasonable.

Kissinger: No one in America, not even people you talk to, would think that it is reasonable to give a date that is totally independent of whatever else happens. We have given you a final date of nine months after an agreement is signed. You can negotiate nine more months. The history has been that you have given us a series of deadlines which we've never met. One of these days you will propose a deadline which we can meet and then it will be too late.

Moreover, if we declare as a statement of principle our neutrality in the elections, our acceptance of the future neutrality of South Vietnam, and the other points that I have mentioned, that would leave the basic issue open.

But I have stated my view and we now have to see what we shall do. If you expect me to come here next time prepared to tell you that we will make a secret agreement to overthrow Thieu then we will both be wasting our time. Because the President will never approve this.

Xuan Thuy/LeDuc Tho: Would you repeat that?

Kissinger: (repeats) . . . and this would waste your time and I would go through the physical exertion for nothing.

So this then is the question. Whether we develop a statement of principles which is relatively neutral or whether you insist on what you have said.

Le Duc Tho: What you said about developing a statement on neutrality, this doesn't mean much. You said that no American would agree to fix a date independent of anything else. However, I can tell you that

no Vietnamese fighting for so many years will accept a settlement without knowing what the future of South Vietnam will be. Therefore to settle the South Vietnamese problem there should be an agreement where both military questions and political questions should be settled. There is no statement regarding peace and neutrality that will suffice.

Kissinger: I said a neutral statement, not a statement of neutrality. I said whatever the government in South Vietnam, we will make a statement which says it must be neutral, can accept only limited predetermined military aid, and other points from Point 5 of Mme. Binh. (repeats again) First, the foreign policy must be neutral. We can accept limitations on military aid and other points. I'm talking about a statement that is neutral, noncommittal for either side. In fact, we are wasting time. I feel an agreement in principle right now would have a greater impact on the political situation in South Vietnam than another year of war. But it is up to you to decide.

Le Duc Tho: You mean agreement in principle, agreement on the framework you mentioned.

Kissinger: Right.

Le Duc Tho: But we have not agreed on the basic issues of the framework.

Kissinger: The only other possibility is that you come with another proposal than the secret agreement to overthrow Thieu. And we will examine it seriously.

Le Duc Tho: What would you propose? What is your desire apart from what you are saying? Whatever proposal you have, make it.

Kissinger: I have made our proposals. I have said what we sincerely believe will have maximum political impact in South Vietnam. We sincerely believe if we settle along the lines of our proposal it will have a maximum impact on the elections. We sincerely believe our withdrawal date will have a maximum impact on the political situation, on elections. Once withdrawal begins and one knows that it is beginning that changes the political situation.

We also believe that another year of war, 15 months without agreement, and with our supplies continuing, and no limitations on military aid and economic aid, everything you're asking us now will be impossible to do and it will be more difficult for you to obtain what you want.

I tell you we are sincerely trying to end the war. To us Vietnam is not a huge issue. We want the war to end and to find a solution which will give us normal relations with the people of Indochina and we don't search for a way to stay in Vietnam. But we're not experts on your judgments of your chances, and it may be you are too suspicious. That may be our tragedy.

Le Duc Tho: You have proposed, put forward something concrete to settle the political question, and we propose to think of a way to settle the political question. But the views you expressed now are the same as what you said this morning. What do you propose now?

Kissinger: If you are prepared to come up with a formula other than what you have offered us, then I will be prepared to examine it with great care and the consideration it merits. And I will in turn look at your problem concerning technical advisers. And that would give us a basis for another meeting.

Xuan Thuy: You referred to the period of John Foster Dulles in 1954. Now with the publication of the Pentagon papers in the American press this question is very clear already. I think that the Nixon Administration should redress the mistake of the previous Administration and should not have continued the same course with the same aim, and it should adopt another course.

Kissinger: But I explained that we have a new course.

Well, Mr. Special Adviser, what do you think? Should we have another meeting? You are the senior member here.

Le Duc Tho: I think that if you think that we should have another meeting, then we should have it.

Xuan Thuy: I feel, Mr. Special Adviser, that both sides should continue to examine the views expressed by the other side and we should meet again. I agree to that.

You told us to make a big effort and you will make a big step forward. We tell you to make an effort and we shall take a big step forward. You advance too slowly.

Kissinger: You don't advance at all.

Xuan Thuy: We've made big steps; everything we propose is concrete.

Kissinger: I don't object to the fact that it is concrete; it is the substance I mind.

Alright, then let's set another meeting. I know it will be extremely difficult to convince the President that we are not wasting time, but I think I can get authority for another meeting.

Let's aim for Saturday the 7th. I have to vary my travels.

Xuan Thuy: In order to give you more time to persuade President Nixon, should we delay the meeting?

Kissinger: I will be on the West Coast the following week, and it will be difficult to come much later from there. It will be very difficult for me to leave because people will be watching me.

Le Duc Tho: There is no worry for you at all, moreover from your country.

Kissinger: Except the press watches me all the time.

Le Duc Tho: Not the *New York Times*.

Kissinger: The Special Adviser monopolizes the *New York Times*, but other papers watch me.

Le Duc Tho: Anyhow it's American journalists.

Kissinger: How about the following Saturday, the 14th?

Xuan Thuy: The 21st?

Kissinger: That's very hard for me. I could come the 15th or the 16th.

Xuan Thuy: So shall we fix it for the 16th?

Kissinger: You just deprived me of another day on the West Coast. OK. I hope the Special Adviser recognizes that Hollywood is only 50 kilometers from San Clemente.

Le Duc Tho: So you have more time to spend there?

Kissinger: 10:30? (Walters notes that August 16 is a French holiday.) I don't want to keep the Minister from his religious observances.

Xuan Thuy: I will sacrifice that.

Kissinger: 10:30?

Xuan Thuy: 10:30.

237. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, July 26, 1971.

SUBJECT

My Meeting with the North Vietnamese July 26, 1971

I had another meeting today with the North Vietnamese.

Although we did not achieve a breakthrough, we have clearly narrowed the issues to one question—the replacement by us of Thieu—and have now left Hanoi to make a decision between this meeting and the next one.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1039, Files For the President, Vietnam Negotiations, HAK II 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for information. There is no indication that Nixon saw it. Kissinger forwarded a slightly different version to Rogers under a covering memorandum, July 27, on which there is a handwritten note indicating that Rogers reviewed it and returned it that day. (Ibid., Box 861, Camp David Memos, July-Dec 1971)

What Was Significant. The meeting revealed the ambivalence of the North Vietnamese position in very stark terms.

—They clearly want a settlement and an early peace, and they want an agreement with us:

- They tried hard to preserve a forthcoming spirit throughout the meeting going far towards our position on all non-political points
- When I suggested breaking off, they repeatedly indicated a desire to continue
- They did not harp on U.S. public opinion during the meeting, and it is also clear that in the last two weeks they have heeded our complaint about propaganda.

—But they are still unable to decide to abandon their demand that we get rid of Thieu by some conspiratorial device rather than leave it to the electoral process. Their ambivalence and confusion were reflected in the wide variety of suggestions they made:

- For example, they said we should make a secret agreement to get rid of Thieu, which they would not reveal.
- However, before then they had said that it was not just Thieu who mattered but also the policy of the South Vietnamese government, which had to be a government of peace.
- They said other candidates in the upcoming elections had positions which favored “peace, independence, and neutrality” and suggested that a victory by one of them, presumably Minh, would do the trick.

It is clear that they were unable to make a decision during the past two weeks. The shock of your impending Peking visit probably complicated their decision,² as did the reported illness of Premier Pham Van Dong, who is one of the key men in the regime.³ We have just gotten a report that a VIP plane from Hanoi touched down briefly in Peking (probably refueling) and is going to Moscow.

Their Dilemma. They now confront, even more dramatically than a few weeks ago, a dilemma which faces them with real anguish and confusion.

² On July 15, Nixon announced that Kissinger had secretly visited the People's Republic of China, that Premier Zhou Enlai had invited the President to visit China, and that Nixon had accepted. (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1971*, pp. 819–820)

³ Message C-6074-AR from the Defense Attaché's Office in Paris to the JCS, July 28, reported that Pham Van Dong was very sick and was expected to live only a few more months. Walters commented that this would be a great loss because Pham Van Dong was “the catalyst to bring conflicting views and groups into alignment for a DRVN government position.” In addition, it would complicate Le Duc Tho's role as a negotiator because he would have to return to Hanoi for most consequential decisions and Hanoi would have difficulty making them without Pham Van Dong. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Cables, 10/69–12/31/71)

This dilemma is that they have fought for many years to gain control over South Vietnam or at least a friendly government, and they cannot clearly see how they will achieve that aim if they stop fighting. On the other hand, they do not see how they can achieve it if they continue.

—Tho reflected this when he said that “no Vietnamese” would accept an agreement without knowing the political future of South Vietnam.

—Their cadres and their public opinion, who have fought so hard and lost so much, may find it very hard to swallow a settlement under which Thieu remains.

—This dilemma was further reflected in their desire not to hold our next meeting for another four or at least three weeks. It is possible that Tho will return to Hanoi in the meantime to discuss the options. In any event, the Politburo requires the time to think things over.

—We have given as positive a position as we can toward having the election genuinely free and to keep our distance from Thieu, offering to make a public pledge of South Vietnamese neutrality, our total non-interference in the political process, our readiness to limit military aid, and a withdrawal deadline. Nonetheless, I made it very clear that we would not, because we could not, overthrow Thieu.

—They said they would study our position further, but I am not sure whether they have the imagination and the confidence to go our way.

As we expected earlier, this meeting did not bring a final result. But they now know that the next one must, and they know the parameters of what is possible and impossible for us to do.

What We Have Gained. Although the political issue is still in doubt, this series of meetings has gained us the following:

—A superb public record of genuine willingness to compromise differences and to let the South Vietnamese people decide their future freely. We have conceded everything even remotely reasonable short of a coup against Thieu—neutrality, limitation on military aid, a withdrawal deadline, a large economic aid program.

—Also, a record of willingness to take steps and make efforts greater than those demanded by our domestic opposition.

—A commitment by the other side stated even more clearly today by Le Duc Tho to release our POWs in exchange for a date. Though this is not enough today we can return to it in the fall.⁴

⁴ The last sentence of this paragraph was not included in the copy provided to Rogers.

What Happened. In addition to the above, the following were the key developments during the meeting:

—Xuan Thuy began in a very friendly tone, saying that we had made some progress even though not yet on the key issues. He said that they were prepared to “consider” the remaining differences on other issues, and confirmed that they would consider them “positively.”

—Tho followed up somewhat harder, emphasizing the remaining differences—including a lack of withdrawal deadline—and saying our negotiating tactics were aimed at getting a settlement which would promote Vietnamization. He also said that our agreements were on secondary points, but not on the crucial issues of a withdrawal deadline and replacing Thieu, the “spinal cord” of a settlement.

—Referring indirectly to the Peking trip, he said there was no “magical way” of settling the Vietnam problem, and that only the participants could end the war. He emphasized their independence and the support they were getting from “socialist countries.”

—In response to Tho’s question of how we should proceed, I suggested that we try to reach agreement on a statement of agreed principles, with considerable detail, in our channel. The remaining details could be negotiated in the regular forum, using our channel to break any deadlocks. They agreed to this procedure.

—I asked about release of our POWs throughout all Indochina, to which they would not commit themselves. I also asked some questions on their political proposals.

—I then told them we were prepared in the next five years to provide \$7.5 billion in aid to Indochina, of which \$2–2.5 billion could go to North Vietnam.

—I told them we were prepared to give a withdrawal deadline of nine months after an agreement is made. In addition, we would:

- Indicate that South Vietnam would be neutral, as stated in Mme. Binh’s Point 5;
- Pledge to accept restrictions on our future military aid to South Vietnam;
- Declare our total neutrality in all political processes;
- Not only make all these statements, which would have a political effect, but also carry them out, which would have a greater effect.

—I made clear that we were not prepared to replace the South Vietnamese government for them.

—I also said we were planning to negotiate a settlement with them and not with anybody else.

—After a long break of almost an hour, they came back and Xuan Thuy asked whether we would be prepared to withdraw all our forces. I said we would be, but that we would want to leave a small number

of technical and logistic advisors to assist in maintenance of our equipment left with the GVN. I said the number would be less than 10,000 at the outset and would decline to a Military Attaché office of much less than one thousand.

—Thuy then said that they wanted a specific date rather than a date which was dependent on an agreement. In the course of this passage, he pledged to release our POWs if we were to give a date “today,” and he said that the date of the end of 1971 was flexible.

—I pointed out that we could not give a fixed date so long as we did not have an agreement, since we would be withdrawing forces against the deadline while they were “considering” our proposals.

—I again reiterated that we could not replace the GVN, and warned them that if we did not make an agreement now they would find that in a year they would have to deal with a stronger GVN which we would have even less chance of influencing, if only because our forces would be so much smaller.⁵

—I also told them that Ambassador Bruce would be leaving soon but that this was not a political act and resulted purely from his state of health. I told them Porter would succeed Bruce; in reply to a question, I said that Habib would leave.

—I made clear that our meeting again would be a waste of time if they did not rethink their political position and consider new formulations. In turn I would try to be helpful on our residual technical/logistic presence. When I pointedly asked Le Duc Tho whether it was worth continuing the channel on this basis, he said that it was.

—We then agreed to meet again at 10:30 on August 16.

⁵ In backchannel message WHS 1070 to Bunker, July 27, Kissinger noted that the North Vietnamese were concentrating on Thieu as the “sole obstacle to peace” and wrote: “We are thus concerned about reports that Ky may not qualify as a candidate, despite necessary endorsements, because of technicality of lack of provincial counter-signatures and other alleged maneuvers by Thieu’s forces.” He asked for Bunker’s opinion on these issues. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 854, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. X)

238. **Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between Secretary of State Rogers and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)**¹

Washington, July 27, 1971, 7:45 p.m.

R: Hi, Henry.

K: When I called you I wanted to check whether you got a copy of my memo to the President.²

R: Yes, I read it. That was interesting.

K: There's just one God-damn thing now.

R: It will be tough for them.

K: It will be murderous for them but equally tough for us. They will be lining up to become our enemies. But they are going through agonies. They don't have the old fire any more. Now when I say next year you will be worse off, they listen and don't argue. They don't say you have lost the war which they used to say.

R: I think things are going well. My God, any time you talk to Americans they are so enthusiastic.

K: If they spring pressure on us again—domestic pressure . . . I don't think McGovern would offer more.

R: The important thing is we are going well. Our casualties last week were 13. This week they are very low.

K: I think it will turn into a non-issue very soon.

[Omitted here is discussion of China.]

K: Well, we have to do it once more. That will tell the story. There's nothing left to talk about. After the election, it will be totally impossible. If they had any flexibility, they would accept what we have offered now. It might affect the election. If worse comes to worse whenever we are ready to pull them all out anyway, we can offer that for prisoners.

R: As far as the prisoners are concerned, I don't know how we could handle it better.

K: They will concentrate on domestic affairs. Every problem we inherited in foreign policy will be solved or alleviated when we go into the election.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 10, Chronological File. No classification marking.

² See footnote 1, Document 237.

R: You know, I went to a reception over there, and people just came up and thanked me. They just volunteered to do it.

K: I haven't been invited to talk at a college campus for a year and a half. That shows the heroism of our college administrators. But I must have had 50 invitations to speak now. And nothing is different. I ran into John Osborne today. He said why didn't we know it. He also said if we had taken seriously what has been said for two years, we would have anticipated it.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

239. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, July 29, 1971.

PARTICIPANTS

Henry A. Kissinger
Ambassador Dobrynin

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

Vietnam

I then turned the conversation to Vietnam. I said we had reason to believe that Hanoi was at a very crucial point in its decision. I knew that Le Duc Tho was returning to Hanoi. While in the last year and a half I had accepted the proposition that the Soviet Union could not do much about Vietnam, I was now approaching him because I thought there was a useful moment for intervention. If the war in Vietnam continued, it was certain that the bargaining position of Hanoi vis-à-vis us would decline. In fact, Hanoi was in the curious position of threatening us with a continuation of the war, at the end of which—whether Hanoi won or lost—we would not be in a position to do for them what they were asking simply because the number of our troops would have declined too much.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 492, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1971, Vol. 7, Part 2. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting was held in General Hughes' office in the East Wing of the White House. According to Kissinger's Record of Schedule, the meeting lasted from 6:38 to 8:10 p.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76) This memorandum is Tab A to a covering memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, August 9. The full text of the memorandum of conversation is printed in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976, Soviet Union*, volume XIII, October 1970–October 1971, Document 303.

Dobrynin said that he had had a full report about my meeting with Le Duc Tho in Paris on July 12. He said I had fooled even him. At first he had thought that of course I was going to meet Le Duc Tho, no matter what the press said; but then when the China initiative was sprung he thought that maybe I had used Le Duc Tho as a cover for Peking. Now he did not know whether I was using Peking as a cover for Le Duc Tho or whether the two were independent. At any rate, he received the telegram about my meeting with Le Duc Tho just after I had had lunch with him to tell him about the Peking meeting.²

Dobrynin said that Hanoi told them that there were only two issues left—setting a deadline and overthrowing the Thieu Government. All other issues Hanoi believed could be settled. I said that I did not think the deadline was an insuperable difficulty; Dobrynin said that this was his impression also. But with respect to the overthrow of the Thieu Government, I said that this was a condition we could not accept. First, because we did not have the power to do so. Second, because it would be dishonorable even to discuss overthrowing the government of an ally. On the other hand, we had made proposals whose practical consequence had to be to give maximum freedom of choice to the South Vietnamese. I recapitulated the proposals we had offered: to set a deadline after final agreement; to affirm the concept of neutrality for Vietnam; and to accept limitations on military and economic aid after a settlement. It was hard to see how much more we could do. I said this would have a profound impact on the election campaign. Dobrynin said, yes, he had to admit that.

Dobrynin then asked me how I proposed to proceed. I said that our idea was that we could sign a statement of principles on the points which we had agreed upon at the private talks and then transmit those to the conference for implementation. He asked how the PRG and the Saigon Administration were going to be handled. Were they going to associate themselves with these principles? I said, yes, they would have to associate themselves with these principles, but I thought this would not be a major difficulty on our side. Dobrynin said, well, it should be possible to find some formula to do this.³

² A memorandum of conversation of the July 19 meeting is *ibid.*, Document 288.

³ In a meeting on August 5, Dobrynin stated that after seeing a report on Kissinger's July 26 meeting with the North Vietnamese, he believed that Hanoi saw the chief obstacles to an agreement as Kissinger's refusal to set a deadline for withdrawals and a desire to keep U.S. military advisers behind. Dobrynin also explained that he believed Hanoi was close to coming to an agreement as outlined to him by Kissinger on January 9; see Document 102. Kissinger suggested that this was an "opportunity for official Soviet intervention on a delicate basis," and Dobrynin agreed to pass this message to Moscow. The memorandum of conversation is printed in full in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIII, Soviet Union, October 1970–October 1971, Document 311.

Dobrynin asked whether we were going to set a firm deadline or whether we were going to make it dependent on the final agreement. I said we were going to make the deadline start running on the day the final agreement was signed, because otherwise I was afraid their allies were going to delay forever, and we would still be talking to them about the other point while the last American troops had left Vietnam. Dobrynin said, well, the trouble with the North Vietnamese is that they want everything signed and delivered. It isn't enough for them to start a political process. They want to make sure that Thieu is overthrown. I said that, short of giving them that assurance, I thought the other points were manageable. Dobrynin said that Hanoi had told them they were willing to continue fighting, but he felt that there was a real desire to come to an agreement this year.⁴

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

⁴ In a letter to Brezhnev, August 5, Nixon wrote: "In assessing the issues which affect the constructive evolution of our relations, one should not overlook the complication posed by the continuation of the conflict in Southeast Asia. As long as the war persists, it inevitably introduces distortion into the policies of some key countries beyond the basic principles outlined in this letter. As Dr. Kissinger has explained to Ambassador Dobrynin, we have made an eminently fair proposal for bringing an end to that conflict on a basis just to all sides. I would hope that the Soviet Union would exercise its influence to achieve peace in that area of the world. Such an action would give a great impetus to the policies of reconciliation we intend to pursue." The letter is printed *ibid.*, Document 309.

240. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, August 3, 1971.

SUBJECT

Air Activities in Southeast Asia: FY 1972 and FY 1973

As you know there has been disagreement within the government over the appropriate U.S. air activities rates for Southeast Asia in FY 1972 and FY 1973.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 156, Vietnam Country Files, Viet Aug 71. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for action. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

MACV and the JCS on the one hand and OSD on the other have urged that the following plans be adopted:

	Sorties per month	
	JCS/MACV	OSD
tactical air	10,000	7,500
B-52	1,000	800

While OSD has favored a lower sortie rate, Secretary Laird in a memorandum to me (at Tab B)² before my recent trip to Saigon, stated: "I plan to recommend for FY 72 sortie levels consonant with MACV's recommendations."

I raised the issue with General Abrams, even suggesting a lower sortie level. His response cited in detail at Tab C,³ was a strong appeal for the MACV/JCS position. Based on General Abrams' view, I have drafted a memorandum for Secretary Laird reporting your decision in favor of the MACV/JCS position and also adding six more C-130 gunships in CY 72—a proposal OSD probably favors.

*Recommendation*⁴

I recommend you approve the decision just described and contained in my draft memorandum for Secretary Laird at Tab A.⁵

² Attached but not printed at Tab B is a July 1 memorandum from Laird to Kissinger.

³ Attached but not printed at Tab C is an undated transcript of a meeting among Kissinger, Abrams, and Bunker. Abrams stated in the transcript: "The 10,000 sortie figure is a reasoned figure based on considerable planning. To retreat from 10,000 will start a flood of further reductions to 9,000, 8,000, 7,000, 6,000 and so on."

⁴ Nixon initialed his approval. According to an August 11 memorandum for the record by Haig of a discussion between Kissinger and Laird on July 20, the Secretary of Defense stated that he did not believe the level could be sustained for 1973. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1025, Presidential/HAK Memcons, MemCon, Sec. Laird, HAK, Gen. Pursley, Gen. Haig, and Adm. Murphy 7/28/71)

⁵ Attached but not printed at Tab A is an August 6 memorandum from Kissinger to Laird, in which he wrote that Nixon had decided on the following monthly levels: for FY 1972—10,000 Tactical Air, 1,000 B-52, and 750 gunships (from the deployment of six C-130 gunships); and for FY 1973 the tactical air sortie levels would be reduced to 8,000 and the other levels would remain the same. He added that the sortie levels would be fully budgeted at a level rate for the period and that the FY 1973 decisions would be reviewed after the 1971–1972 dry season.

241. Minutes of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, August 10, 1971, 2:10–3:25 p.m.

SUBJECT

Laos

PARTICIPATION

Chairman: Henry A. Kissinger

State:

Mr. U. Alexis Johnson

Mr. William H. Sullivan

Mr. G. McMurtie Godley

Mr. Mark Pratt

Defense:

Mr. David Packard

Rear Adm. W.R. Flanagan

JCS:

Lt. Gen. John W. Vogt

CIA:

Lt. Gen. Robert E. Cushman

Mr. Charles Whitehurst

[*name not declassified*]

NSC Staff:

Col. Richard T. Kennedy

Mr. John H. Holdridge

Mr. John Negroponte

Mr. Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—the Laos Ad Hoc Group would draft a negotiating cable to the field, separating the two issues of talks and a neutralization of the Plain of Jars. Our objective should be a neutralization of the Plain of Jars, as an outcome of talks, and Vang Pao's forces should not be pulled off the Plain until an agreement on neutralization is reached.

—Col. Kennedy would summarize the decisions taken on military readiness measures—Thai SGUs, Lao SGUs, A-1s, M-60s and gunship helicopters—and circulate them to the WSAG members.

Dr. Kissinger: Are we going to start off with a briefing?

Gen. Cushman: If you desire.

Dr. Kissinger: Yes, I think it would be a good idea to get a run-down of the present situation, if it can be done with reasonable speed.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals 1971. Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. All brackets except those that indicate omission of unrelated material are in the original. Although a Senior Review Group meeting on Laos was scheduled for August 10, no minutes have been found.

Gen. Cushman: (Uses large map, showing the disposition of the Laotian, North Vietnamese and Thai forces in the Plain of Jars area). The situation in the Plain of Jars is rather static, from the point of view of movement of forces. Vang Pao has three battalions in operation in the northeastern sector of the Plain, and he has met some resistance.

Dr. Kissinger: Have we stopped him, or was it the enemy?

Gen. Cushman: The enemy. Vang Pao is getting artillery support from the Thai battalions behind him on the Plain. I should point out, however, that nobody is going anywhere. I doubt that he can seize the territory to the north and east of the Plain. I don't think he can achieve his objectives.

The issue is whether we want Vang Pao to withdraw from his extended positions as an inducement to talks, or whether we want him to use the good military position as a possible chip in bargaining with the North Vietnamese. Militarily, he is in fairly good shape. He is being hit by some mortar fire, and he is taking casualties from enemy patrols. In essence, though, the situation is static. The question is what does he do if the enemy brings in additional units. If he is attacked, he is well-set to conduct defensive operations and an orderly retreat, unlike two years ago, when he was routed. The situation was saved two years ago by bringing in additional SGUs.

Mr. Johnson: Is Vang Pao operating only against the NVA, or is he also facing the PL?

Gen. Cushman: He is facing some local PL forces.

Dr. Kissinger: We called this meeting in order to discuss the negotiating scenario and the relationship of Vang Pao's operations to the scenario. We also have to discuss the military steps we must take now and before the next dry season to retain the necessary flexibility if the negotiations fail. In addition, we should see whether we can settle the issue of logistical support while there still is something to support. Finally, we should consider the legislative restrictions. Alex [Johnson] or Bill [Sullivan], do you want to brief us on the negotiating scenario?

Mr. Sullivan: You recall that at the last meeting² we agreed that the prospects for real negotiations were nil, except in the context of the Vietnamese situation. We look upon the scenario as a sophistry which enables us to arrange a conditional ceasefire under the guise of creating proper security for the internal Lao talks at a site on the PDJ. We don't expect the talks to really get anywhere.

Dr. Kissinger: Why would the other side want to accept our proposals?

² See Document 215.

Mr. Sullivan: They might want to accept them because there has been continued fighting, yet they have not gained territory, and they have suffered considerable casualties. If they accepted the sophistry, we could have talks which could precipitate a military standdown. Souvanna has also talked of neutralizing the Plain of Jars.

With regard to the forward movement of Vang Pao, there are also indications that part of the North Vietnamese 312th division is moving back into position to clip off some of Vang Pao's forces. The Pathet Lao plenipotentiary went home last Saturday and made a statement to the effect that nibbling attacks by U.S. puppets make it impossible to go ahead with the talks. On top of all this, Souvanna is planning to leave soon for his annual cure in France.

Dr. Kissinger: Wouldn't he give up his cure in order to proceed with negotiations?

Mr. Sullivan: He would. But he also thinks a lot of the details can be handled by his subordinates.

Vang Pao talked to our Chargé and the CIA station chief in terms of holding on to the territory in the Plain as a permanent home for the Meo. This is counter to our scenario and to Souvanna's thoughts. Souvanna will agree to pull Vang Pao off the PDJ, in return for a general understanding of a military standdown. We must get instructions to our people to have a heart-to-heart talk with Souvanna on the proposals. We also have to state the facts of life to Vang Pao. I think he has just been trying to see what the traffic will bear, and I don't expect him to be an intractable problem. If the scenario is approved, we can at least tell that much to Souvanna. We must also tell him what we are prepared to do to back him.

Some of the language in the part of the paper dealing with military measures is a bit fuzzy because it is compromise language. I see five fuzzy elements.

Dr. Kissinger: Are we clear on any element?

Mr. Sullivan: Yes, on everything but these five elements.

Dr. Kissinger: How many elements are there? Six?

Mr. Sullivan: Yes. Somebody must have briefed you. The first element is the Thai SGU. Do we approve a total of 36 Thai SGU battalions, or do we hold at 24? We can hold a portion of these SGUs for potential use in the North, and others could be used against the Trail.

The second element is the recruitment of Lao forces. Do we recruit additional Lao SGU battalions, or do we recruit available manpower into the special reserve divisions of the Lao Army? The third element is the improvement of equipment. Do we equip the irregular forces with improved equipment, principally the M-60 machine gun? We also have to consider giving these items to the Lao regular forces. If so, the cost would be high, and the Lao regular forces would probably not be

able to use and maintain the equipment. The fourth element is U.S. air support. How long will the A-1s be available? The final element involves medevac helicopters and air cover for them. The slicks are there on loan now, from CINCPAC, I believe. Can we have them for an extended period of time? What about the cover for them? The Field prefers helo gunships. What about pilots? I think that if we have Americans in the slicks, we need Americans in the gunships. If we can get Laotians or Thais for the whole kit and caboodle, this will ease our problem—provided there is no Congressional problem.

Dr. Kissinger: How would you handle the instructions to the Field?

Mr. Sullivan: We want to have a firm package.

Dr. Kissinger: I agree. We can't say that we are undecided on five issues.

Mr. Packard: What is the sixth element?

Dr. Kissinger: That we should send instructions to the Field.

Mr. Sullivan: The sixth element is that it would be useful to have a military standdown. Everyone concurred in it.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Godley) Mac, do you agree with that?

Mr. Godley: Yes. I do think it would be useful to have a stand-down—provided we didn't give away all of our marbles. Souvanna would like a standdown, even Vang Pao would like one.

Dr. Kissinger: What do you mean by "giving our marbles away?"

Mr. Godley: An example would be if we threatened to reduce our air sorties and said, "Ergo, we must have a standdown." There should be no question of our taking such action. We should reiterate our desire for a standdown and a ceasefire—for de-escalation. We have always said we were for de-escalation. The nuance now is that we are talking about a ceasefire—perhaps even a ceasefire that could be extended in a radius of thirty kilometers around the talk site. I don't think this idea would shock Souvanna.

Dr. Kissinger: Why are we interested in it?

Mr. Godley: We would like to bring about a localized ceasefire because we have always had the hope—a remote hope, to be sure—that we could get substantive discussions going between Souvanna and Souphanouvong. Of course, the success of these discussions would be intimately related to the enemy's intent.

Mr. Johnson: A ceasefire would also help maintain the status quo in Laos.

Dr. Kissinger: I am always playing the part of the devil's advocate. So many of our discussions about negotiating with the North Vietnamese are like detective stories. We are always looking for a clue. We are always looking for something that might happen. If the North Vietnamese want something, they should ask for it.

Mr. Godley: Ever since March, 1970, they have been playing a cat-and-mouse game. I do not see any disadvantage in our side making clear that it wants talks and a ceasefire.

Dr. Kissinger: If Souvanna genuinely wants talks, how much muscle does he have to bring them about?

Mr. Godley: He has some.

Mr. Sullivan: He will need some muscle to deal with Vang Pao.

Mr. Packard: What about the idea of a standdown in place?

Dr. Kissinger: If a standdown is so desirable, why does Vang Pao have to pull back to the western rim of the PDJ?

Mr. Sullivan: We would start out by proposing that Vang Pao stay in place. We would propose the establishment of a stable line between Vang Pao and the NVA. However, since it is unlikely the other side would accept this line, Vang Pao would probably have to withdraw to the western edge of the PDJ in order to trigger the talks.

Dr. Kissinger: We could move the site of the talks. What would happen if we proposed that the site of the talks be Long Tieng and if they took Long Tieng? Then if I came into this room and said we should go east of Long Tieng before the negotiations start, the newspapers would say the White House was screwing up the negotiations. It's easier to move the site of the talks than Vang Pao.

Mr. Johnson: Neither side has held the Plain over the years.

Dr. Kissinger: We should offer the neutralization of the Plain as an outcome of the talks. Why not say that one result of the talks could be the neutralization of the Plain? (to Mr. Sullivan) You are proposing that Vang Pao move out before the talks really get started.

Mr. Sullivan: Both sides would pull out from the Plain. We would propose that the ceasefire be adequately monitored by "neutralist" and Lao elements, and Souvanna would seek a mixed ICC presence on the talk site.

Dr. Kissinger: What would happen if the North Vietnamese moved on to the PDJ again?

Mr. Sullivan: There would be a resumption of fighting.

Dr. Kissinger: And Vang Pao would already have given up his defensive positions.

Mr. Godley: There are no defensive positions on the PDJ.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Sullivan) I remember that you said after the rout of 1970 that it took about six weeks to develop.

Mr. Sullivan: This would be a different situation. Vang Pao would come out, but there would be no North Vietnamese on the PDJ, either.

Dr. Kissinger: If we assume the NVA break the agreement—and it would not be unusual for them to do so—what would happen? We

would start bombing again, but we would probably spend two weeks debating whether they had indeed violated the agreement before we began the bombing. I am just trying to understand if we are better off making them fight through the Plain and suggesting another site for the talks, or if we are better off vacating the Plain. Why don't we propose a ceasefire in place?

Mr. Sullivan: If we propose a ceasefire in place, we won't get the talks or a ceasefire.

Dr. Kissinger: How do you know?

Mr. Godley: It might be worthwhile to propose a ceasefire in place.

Dr. Kissinger: We could stop the bombing if it's worth something to the other side.

Mr. Johnson: Why should they accept a ceasefire in place when they can gain control of the PDJ again?

Dr. Kissinger: But they can only get it back again by fighting.

Mr. Sullivan: And then we would have them on the western side of the PDJ.

Dr. Kissinger: That's your assessment.

Mr. Packard: A ceasefire in place would be better if we could get it. Perhaps we should start out by trying to establish one.

Dr. Kissinger: I agree. What's wrong with that?

Mr. Sullivan: Souvanna has already proposed neutralizing the Plain. What you suggest now would mean that he would be upping his price.

Dr. Kissinger: The outcome of the talks should be the neutralization of the PDJ.

Mr. Sullivan: The current phase of the talks is taking place in Vientiane, not Khang Khay. The next phase of the talks would be held at Khang Khay, and only if this phase takes place would Vang Pao pull back from his advanced positions.

Dr. Kissinger: Why don't we make the pull back and the neutralization of the PDJ the outcome of the negotiations? You want Vang Pao to pull back before the negotiations start.

Mr. Sullivan: Perhaps the word "negotiation" is causing the problem here. Talks are going on now. Before Souk Vongsak went back to Hanoi last weekend, he set certain conditions for the PDJ, which Vang Pao is still holding. If Souvanna can get an agreement for a military standdown in the guise of creating security for the next phase of the talks, presumably at Khang Khay, he would agree to pull Vang Pao back from his advanced positions.

Dr. Kissinger: This wouldn't be a permanent neutralization of the Plain. The NVA could take it any time they wished.

Mr. Sullivan: If they did, the bombing would resume.

Dr. Kissinger: That wouldn't bother them, especially during the rainy season. If you were the North Vietnamese, wouldn't you prefer to have Vang Pao pulled back to the western edge of the PDJ? Then you could go through it without opposition. The only consequence of that action would be the breakdown of the talks. I do not understand why we want Vang Pao to withdraw just to find a site for the talks.

Mr. Sullivan: He cannot regard the PDJ as a permanent home for his people.

Dr. Kissinger: That is a theological point. The NVA will teach him that, anyway, during the next dry season. Why can't we use a cease-fire in place as a means of bringing about a de-escalation?

Mr. Sullivan: I think they will accept a military standdown.

Dr. Kissinger: How many miles are involved in the pull-back of Vang Pao's forces?

Mr. Sullivan: About eight.

Mr. Packard: That's not a very big distance.

Dr. Kissinger: I just don't understand the psychology of this.

Mr. Packard: Nothing has worked during the past three years, so we want to try something else now.

Dr. Kissinger: If I said that I wanted the NVA to pull back two miles in order to get the talks started, all hell would break loose about the intransigence of the White House on this issue.

Mr. Sullivan: The NVA have pulled back. They can, however, move again during the dry season.

Dr. Kissinger: Of course they can. They could go all the way to Vientiane if they wanted to.

Mr. Sullivan: Our proposal provides a means for keeping them east of the PDJ.

Mr. Johnson: The talks are a sophistry, as Bill [Sullivan] said, for a ceasefire and for an agreement that would keep them east of the PDJ.

Dr. Kissinger: When the North Vietnamese want something, they hit you over the head with a baseball bat six times so that you are aware of what they want. When have we ever tricked them? Have we ever come up with a cute ploy that tricked them into something we wanted? Can anyone cite such an instance?

Mr. Johnson: You are right? They only do something if they want to do it.

Mr. Sullivan: We haven't had a rocket in the center of Saigon in a long time.

Dr. Kissinger: If we stop the bombing, they stay in place. This seems to me to be the best deal to get talks started. It also makes sense

to me to try to establish a neutral area as a result of the talks. But to say that we want a neutral area just to get talks started, doesn't make sense because they could end the talks any time they want. When the dry season starts, they can advance if they want to.

Gen. Vogt: We can try to start the negotiations with a ceasefire.

Dr. Kissinger: I see two things we should try to achieve: (1) a ceasefire; and (2) a neutralization of the PDJ in its own right. If we follow your proposals just to get a site for the talks, the other side could end the talks and advance. Why can't we propose a neutralization of the PDJ and forget about the site for the talks? We could propose that Vang Pao pull back ten miles, provided the other side stays in place. Would that be a generous offer?

Mr. Sullivan: No. The other side would be able to come back.

Mr. Packard: Yes, but at a cost.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Sullivan) Why should the other side make any kind of deal if you say they could come back at no cost? If you say neutralization of the PDJ might become permanent, why don't we offer it? They always complain about us taking the PDJ, and we complain about them taking it.

Mr. Sullivan: This gets into a theological point. They say that in 1962 the PDJ was on their side of the line.

Dr. Kissinger: Do you think that talks between Souvanna and Souphanouvong will change the theology of the situation? If a neutralization of the PDJ suits our mutual purposes, why don't we offer it?

Mr. Sullivan: We tried to in the past, but nothing worked.

Dr. Kissinger: We don't know if this proposal will work now.

Mr. Sullivan: They have already complained about the area of the talk site being nibbled at by U.S. puppets.

Dr. Kissinger: If your scenario is enacted, the other side would get an end to the bombing, a pull-back of Vang Pao's forces and a psychological advantage. What would we get? We would have no assurance that their advance during the dry season would be delayed.

Mr. Sullivan: We would at least keep the NVA on the eastern side of the PDJ until they decide to break the agreement.

Dr. Kissinger: Yes, but this is the situation as it exists today.

Mr. Sullivan: They are already bringing in the 312th Division.

Gen. Cushman: I think it's too early to worry about the 312th Division. We have only had some indications of movement.

Dr. Kissinger: Until they decide to move, then, the situation would be the way it is today. (to Mr. Sullivan) You are saying that they will not move until they decide to do so.

Mr. Sullivan: Right now we are flying air missions and taking casualties. With a ceasefire, there would be no more sorties. We would also save U.S. lives.

Dr. Kissinger: How many Americans have died there recently?

Mr. Sullivan: Six in the last couple of months.

Mr. Godley: There was one crash of an Air America plane.

Mr. Sullivan: We would also be saving U.S. dollars and wear-and-tear with the Congress and the public.

Dr. Kissinger: Until it starts all over again.

Mr. Packard: We could try to build up our capability of stopping the NVA at the Long Tieng complex. We can ask Vang Pao to pull back to Long Tieng and to concentrate on building up his defenses there.

Dr. Kissinger: Nobody is suggesting that Vang Pao advance.

Mr. Johnson: We could try to do what Dave just suggested, pursuant to an agreement.

Mr. Packard: What do the NVA want to do? I don't agree that they can go to Vientiane any time they want. So far they haven't been able to take Long Tieng. It might be a good idea to pull Vang Pao back to Long Tieng and to have him concentrate on his defenses.

Dr. Kissinger: What price would we pay in order to pull Vang Pao back? (to Mr. Godley) Mac, what do you think?

Mr. Godley: It would be tough to pull him back to the western fringe of the PDJ. Nevertheless, I think we can sell him the idea of a neutral area—either a permanent neutral area or a temporary one which could eventually become permanent. This could be sold to him without too much trouble, especially if we build up his defensive capabilities and augment the Thai SGUs.

Dr. Kissinger: That [augmentation of Thai SGUs] is in dispute.

Mr. Sullivan: What is the value of the PDJ?

Dr. Kissinger: It is of no particular value. I wonder what Hanoi thinks. When we talk about a ceasefire and a neutralization of the PDJ, both of these things make sense. But when we say we will stop the bombing and pull Vang Pao back just for the advantage of having talks, that makes no sense. We have repeated the pattern before: we pay and the other side talks. I wonder how this affects the other side's image of us. I'm not saying, though, that we shouldn't do anything.

Mr. Sullivan: If Vang Pao stays where he is, the NVA will attack him during the dry season. Would we want him to hold?

Dr. Kissinger: No. He will fall back, using the PDJ for space.

Mr. Sullivan: Then we will be in a worse situation.

Dr. Kissinger: You assume the NVA will not take the PDJ while talks are going on. If they don't want the PDJ, we should make an

offer for neutralization now. We can have talks, but we should separate the two issues of talks and the neutralization of the PDJ.

Mr. Sullivan: Souvanna has already tied neutralization of the Plain to the talks.

Dr. Kissinger: If he changes his position, it won't be the first time a proposal has been modified.

Mr. Sullivan: I agree that the talks themselves are irrelevant. We should separate the issues.

Dr. Kissinger: Is it inconceivable to you that they may want a period of quiet? If there are talks, perhaps they can have six months of quiet. Then they could start an attack with a better build-up. They would also be ten miles further forward. Is that inconceivable?

Mr. Sullivan: I'm not sure they would be ten miles further forward.

Mr. Johnson: We are not really far apart on this issue. We can come up with a proposal for the neutralization of the PDJ and not make it dependent on the talks taking place.

Dr. Kissinger: I am not interested in supporting Vang Pao. In fact, I tried to stop him before others did. The issue now is what do we have to pay in order to get talks started.

Adm. Flanagan: The talks, as I understand it, will be held in Khang Khay. Who controls it?

Gen. Cushman: Khang Khay is in NVA hands.

Mr. Sullivan: There have been clashes, though, within one kilometer of it.

Mr. Johnson: We seem to be confused on what we should do to get talks started. But we are not confused about the objective, which is neutralization of the PDJ.

Mr. Packard: Let's call a spade a spade and get on with it.

Mr. Sullivan: We can try to bring about the neutralization of the PDJ. The only instrument we have for this, however, is the sophistry of the talks. I don't think the talks themselves will amount to anything.

Dr. Kissinger: We can say we want two things: (1) talks, presumably at Khang Khay; and (2) neutralization of the PDJ. Even if the talks break down, it will still be possible to have the PDJ neutralized.

Mr. Sullivan: We must first make it clear that if the talks break down, we would still want the PDJ to be neutralized. We will have to watch the NVA very carefully.

Dr. Kissinger: Vang Pao should not withdraw before the talks start because I don't want to break his back for the NVA.

Mr. Sullivan: Vang Pao's primary concern is the security of the area. If we give him ten miles of neutral land, it will provide better security.

Dr. Kissinger: I made my point before.

Mr. Godley: Souvanna has proposed a neutral area of thirty kilometers around Khang Khay. This takes in most of the access roads.

Dr. Kissinger: Has the other side pulled out of there?

Mr. Godley: No. They have proposed a nationwide ceasefire.

Dr. Kissinger: How will we advance this [modified] proposal?

Mr. Sullivan: We can draft a new paper, with emphasis on the neutralization of the PDJ.

Dr. Kissinger: And we will ask Vang Pao to retreat only after agreement has been reached on neutralization. Is that all right with everybody? Now, can we move on to the military steps we must take? Can we settle the five issues before us?

Mr. Sullivan: As you know, there is a divergence of views on these steps. Perhaps I can start by giving you our views. With regard to the Thai SGUs, I think it would probably be useful to undertake all 36 battalions.

Mr. Johnson: The timing, however, should be related to the progress of the defense bill on the Hill.³ The progress has been good so far, and we don't want to precipitate any problems until the bill is passed.

Mr. Sullivan: Twenty-four SGUs are being recruited and trained right now.

Dr. Kissinger: We can't handle any new ones until October, anyway. And by then the bill should be passed.

Mr. Sullivan: Perhaps. The vote on the bill may be on this very issue. I believe the question of keeping the program going was put to you by Thanat Khoman [Thai Foreign Minister] when you were in Bangkok.⁴

Dr. Kissinger: If we agree, we can give him assurance of implementing the full program, subject to our Congressional schedule.

Adm. Flanagan: We have to pay a high price for the Thai SGU battalions, and they slow down the improvement of the Lao forces. We think that we have to address the long-term solution, which is the improvement of the FAR.

Dr. Kissinger: Why do I suffer from the belief that the FAR are not fighters?

³ The annual Defense Appropriations bill, which was approved in the Senate Armed Services Committee on August 4, was awaiting approval by the full Senate in September after the Congressional recess.

⁴ Kissinger visited Bangkok July 5 and 6. For his discussion with Thanom about the Thai SGU battalions, see *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XX, Southeast Asia, 1969–1972, Document 127.

Adm. Flanagan: In the long term, we have to depend on the FAR. This means improving the leadership, equipment and pay. It is a short-term measure to go with the SGUs.

Dr. Kissinger: They will provide help next year, when we need it.

Adm. Flanagan: They will provide some help.

Mr. Sullivan: The main problem with the FAR is the leadership. When we provide money, it goes to the generals and never gets down to the fighting men. You have to consider the organic nature of the Lao hierarchy when you talk about their forces in the field. We need the SGUs.

Mr. Godley: I propose that we continue our work at the FAR training center. We shouldn't have any illusion, though, that in the next five years the FAR capabilities will be equal to those of the SGUs. Over the long term, I think the Lao SGUs can be brought back into the FAR and be incorporated into the FAR as units. However, I don't think it's correct to say that only the FAR will be able to provide long-term security.

Adm. Flanagan: In the short term, we have to go with the SGUs. But over the long term, we have to depend on the FAR, just the way we depend on the ARVN and FANK.

Mr. Packard: That may be true, but we are talking about next year.

Dr. Kissinger: Can we agree that subject to the Congressional schedule, we will go ahead with the 12 additional Thai SGUs in the last quarter of this year?

All agreed.

Mr. Sullivan: The next item is U.S. air support.

Mr. Packard: I'm giving up on everything, but not on this.

Mr. Sullivan: How long will we have the A-1s?

Dr. Kissinger: We finally got a plane that can hit something, and now he [Packard] wants to pull them out.

Gen. Vogt: They will remain until the first quarter of FY73. Some of them will start leaving at that time.

Mr. Packard: They will remain through the next dry season. That ought to keep everybody happy.

Mr. Sullivan: What about after that?

Mr. Packard: They are committed through the dry season, but they are not committed forever.

Mr. Godley: I can accept this.

Mr. Packard: You should all quit while you are ahead.

Dr. Kissinger: We can tell Souvanna, then, the A-1s will be there through the next dry season.

Mr. Sullivan: The next thing to consider is the M-60 machine gun.

Dr. Kissinger: Before we get to that, let me ask if the A-1 sortie rate will stay the same?

Mr. Packard: The A-1s will keep their full capabilities.

Dr. Kissinger: This means there will be no greater limitation on them than there has been this year, right?

Gen. Vogt: We are down to 24 operational planes at the present time. This figure will probably remain constant through the dry season, and they will remain at full capability.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Godley) Is that OK with you, Mac? There will be no additional sortie limitation on the A-1s.

Mr. Godley: That's all I can ask for.

Col. Kennedy: Will there be enough money to maintain the current capabilities?

Adm. Flanagan: Yes. We can continue to give the A-1s the same priority.

Dr. Kissinger: Now let's turn to the M-60.

Mr. Sullivan: Bob [Cushman] is our expert on this subject.

Gen. Cushman: We would like to have the machine guns. The trouble is that DOD won't give them to us.

Adm. Flanagan: We would have to know how many M-60s you need, and we would also have to know the price. In any case, whatever you get will come out of the hide of the U.S. Army. We will do it. It's a question of replacing the M-60 with newer and better weapons.

Dr. Kissinger: I don't think the White House should get involved in this.

Mr. Packard: (to Mr. Godley) How many M-60s do you need? [for the FAR]

Dr. Kissinger: Fulbright would object if he knew there was a machine gun expert at the White House.

Mr. Godley: I can handle the situation if you can give me some machine guns for the FAR.

Mr. Sullivan: There is no need to equip the whole FAR with M-60s. We can hand out certain numbers as a sop to proven regular units.

Dr. Kissinger: Can we set aside a fixed number of machine guns for the FAR?

Gen. Cushman: In April we requested 187 M-60s, at a cost of \$1.1 million.

Dr. Kissinger: We don't have to give them all to Mac [Godley].

Mr. Sullivan: What about the helicopters? This is also a complex subject.

Gen. Cushman: During the rainy season, when the A-1s cannot fly cover, the gunships have to do it. The Thais have not supplied the pilots for the gunships.

Dr. Kissinger: Are the A-1s flying cover now?

Gen. Cushman: Not all the time. Sometimes the gunships do it.

Dr. Kissinger: If we had our choice, who would we want to fly the gunships?

Gen. Vogt: We do have a pilot problem. Perhaps the Thais can pick up the load.

Mr. Johnson: We would have a legal problem with the Fulbright amendment⁵ if we used Thai pilots.

Dr. Kissinger: Who flies the A-1s?

Gen. Vogt: Americans.

Mr. Sullivan: The slicks are operated by Air America crews.

Gen. Vogt: It's easier for Americans to fly the A-1s because they fly from U.S. bases in Thailand. The helicopters need advance bases. We have had indications that the Thais are willing to fly the gunships. Someone reported to me that during a recent trip to Thailand, a Thai official told him that nobody had ever asked the Thais to fly gunships in Laos. He said they would be willing to do it.

Gen. Cushman: They have been asked. The official was probably afraid to admit it, though, before his superiors.

Mr. Sullivan: Can we provide the gunships?

Dr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Johnson) Alex, can we mention this in the other package?

Mr. Johnson: Sure. We will say Laotian aircraft flown by Thais.

Adm. Flanagan: We will have to work out the contractual arrangements.

Mr. Sullivan: We will get the aircraft from DOD.

Dr. Kissinger: Let's move now to the logistical support. Have we implemented the decisions we made at the June 8 meeting for logistical back-up in Thailand but operational control where it is now?

Adm. Flanagan: There is a lot of DOD money involved in these operations, so we feel we must plan and program. Last year, we were hit with multi-million dollar bills. An advance group will be there September 1. The whole group will be up at Udorn by December 31. We're not far from saying that the fellow up there is merely a quartermaster.

Dr. Kissinger: Is everyone happy with this arrangement?

Mr. Godley: Over the long term, there is a need for a quartermaster function up there. The main thing, though, is that I don't want him between me and 7/13 Air Force. I will, of course, keep him fully informed.

Mr. Packard: This can be worked out.

⁵ The Fulbright Amendment, introduced and passed in 1970, prohibited the use of mercenaries.

Dr. Kissinger: One final thing. We want to make sure we are opposed to all legal restrictions, even ceilings limiting us to what we are spending now. We still don't want them. Bill [Sullivan] can you draft the negotiating cable in the light of what we discussed today?⁶ Dick [Kennedy] can you sum up the military decisions and circulate them?⁷

⁶ The negotiating instructions were sent in telegram 150229 to Vientiane, August 17. For the Communists, the instructions suggested suspending the bombing of the area, but not aerial reconnaissance and intelligence operations; for Vang Pao, a military assistance package to protect him if the Communists were to break the agreement; and for Souvanna Phouma, a package to beef up the RLG military. The Department asked the Embassy to approach Souvanna and enlist his aid in gaining Vang Pao's concurrence. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27–14 LAOS)

⁷ In a memorandum to Rogers, Laird, Helms, and Moorer, August 16, Kissinger summarized the decisions on Thai SGUs, Lao SGUs, A-1 helicopters, M-60 machine guns, and helicopter gunships. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-82, WSAG Meeting, Laos 8-10-71)

242. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, August 10, 1971, noon–1 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Lt. General Sisowath Sirik Matak, Prime Ministerial Delegate
of the Khmer Republic
The President
Dr. Kissinger, Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Mrs. Porson, Interpreter

The Prime Minister thanked the President for all the kindness shown him during his visit to the United States, and said how honored and pleased he was to see the President again. He conveyed to the President the good wishes and admiration of Chief of State Cheng Heng and Marshal Lon Nol.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 85, Memoranda for the President, Beginning August 8, 1971. Secret; Nodis. The meeting took place in the Oval Office. (Ibid., White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) Kissinger forwarded the memorandum to Nixon under a covering memorandum, August 10. In an August 13 memorandum to Kissinger, Froebe informed him that pursuant to his instructions, only one copy of the original memorandum was made and that a sanitized version would be sent to the Department of State. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 512, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. XIII)

The President said that we in the United States greatly admire the Cambodian people for their courage. At the time the invasion started, there were many who predicted almost every day on television and in the news (especially the AP correspondent in Phnom Penh) that Cambodia would fall. But they did not reckon with the 7,000,000 Cambodians who, although a peaceful people, were willing to make sacrifices and to fight for their independence.

It was the President's belief that Cambodia could only be saved by the Cambodians. No country could be saved without the ultimate sacrifice of its people. He thought the example of Cambodia was a good one for the world to see—the example of a peaceful people compelled to build up its military capacity so as to defend itself and to meet the challenge presented.

The Prime Minister thanked the President for his kind words. He could confirm that the Cambodians were indeed determined; after all, Cambodia had been reduced to its simplest territorial expression. Cambodia, a country with a long history, now found itself with less territory than ever before. The Cambodian people could not allow foreign aggressors to take over that territory.

As the President knew, the Prime Minister continued, at the beginning of the aggression by the North Vietnamese Communists and the Viet Cong, the Cambodian Army had practically nothing. Volunteers went to the front almost empty-handed and some went into combat without ever having fired a rifle.

The President remarked that he remembered having seen Cambodian soldiers back in 1953 engaged in rifle practice with wooden guns.

The Prime Minister said that Prince Sihanouk, under the former regime, never did anything to make the Army capable of defending the country. Sihanouk followed a policy of neutrality which he thought would enable him to maintain tranquillity and peace in Cambodia. Unfortunately, however, in later years he was unable to follow the course that the Khmer people wanted, a middle course of active neutrality. In the later years of Sihanouk regime, there was collusion with the Communists, which made it possible for foreign troops to remain on Cambodian territory and to develop the sanctuaries that were harbors for aggressors right in the Cambodian homeland.

The President asked about the morale of the population; what percentage of the 7,000,000 people supported the government, and how many tended toward the forces that the Communists and the anti-government elements were trying to build up?

The Prime Minister answered that his government had a defense plan, whereby there was a line cutting Cambodia in two. The government had decided to leave the north and northeast sectors of the country as they were for the time being. Prior to the aggression the popu-

lation of that area was only about 300,000. The government drew its defense line to protect the heavily populated and much richer section of the country. And, he reported, the military situation was very much improved.

The President again asked about the people under the government's control; what percentage supported the government, and what percentage might be potential subverters of the government?

The Prime Minister replied that there were two factors to consider. First, there was a region still under Communist control where the people were not for the North Vietnamese but simply could not leave. The Prime Minister estimated that they represented about 30 percent of the population. The remainder had sought refuge in the large cities. Prior to the aggression, Phnom Penh, for example, had had a population of 600,000; at present, there were 2,000,000. This, of course, raised many problems such as shelter, water, electricity, and food.

The President asked how the Prime Minister saw the prospects for the next year. Could his government resist the North Vietnamese invaders, or was there a great, medium, or minimal risk that the North Vietnamese could launch an offensive that could succeed in defeating the Cambodian forces?

The Prime Minister answered that his government and people had just come through the most critical period, the dry season. It would be very difficult for the enemy to reorganize during the imminent rainy season. Furthermore, he placed the present North Vietnamese strength in Cambodia at 55,000–60,000. At the start of the aggression there had been 60,000. Two months later another 60,000 had come in, making a total of 120,000 well-equipped, well-armed, and seasoned troops. Now, they were back down to the number given. There were four North Vietnamese divisions in Cambodia now, including the First Division in the south. That division, however, was very tired and completely disorganized, as the Cambodians had discovered during the operation relating to National Highway 4.

The President asked whether the population of Phnom Penh was confident or fearful of the future. How was their morale? In the American press it was reported (although not as much as six months ago) that the residents of Phnom Penh feared that the North Vietnamese would inevitably overrun the country. On the other hand, one also heard that the Cambodian people were regaining confidence owing to the events of the past few months. How confident were they? Did they think the war would be won and that Cambodia would retain its independence, or did they believe that the North Vietnamese would take over completely?

The Prime Minister answered that his compatriots were confident—that they all believed the war would be won. Indeed, the Cambodians

would not let the war be lost; they wanted to regain the abandoned territory in the north and northeast.

The President asked what effect the withdrawal of United States troops from Vietnam would have on the morale of the Cambodians. Would that withdrawal be interpreted in Cambodia and elsewhere as a U.S. withdrawal from Asia, and thus be very depressing on the people's morale? He solicited the Prime Minister's honest opinion.

The Prime Minister said that this was a topic that he had wanted to discuss with the President. His countrymen were very concerned, very concerned indeed, about the withdrawal of United States troops from South Vietnam, for two reasons. First, the Cambodian Army, which the government was in the process of developing, organizing, training, and equipping, was not yet able to do its work by itself. Therefore, it still needed the air support provided by United States forces. If U.S. withdrawal were to entail the withdrawal of U.S. air support—which Cambodia needed on a daily basis—then that could disrupt the work of the Cambodian military.

The second reason the Prime Minister gave he qualified as very important and serious, and that was the matter of the cooperation of the South Vietnamese troops in Cambodia. Although the South Vietnamese had come to help the Cambodians, when they went into operation they did much harm to the population. The Prime Minister was convinced that this was not the desire or intent of the South Vietnamese Government, but it was at the lower echelons that reprehensible acts had been committed against the Cambodian people.

Therefore, U.S. withdrawal was a matter of much concern to the people and government of Cambodia.

The President asked the Prime Minister whether he shared the view of some Asians that the Nixon Doctrine was a camouflage to enable the United States to get out of Asia and to leave Asia to the devices of China, Russia, or Japan. He asked the question as the devil's advocate, because that was what some were saying, although that of course was not the purpose of the Nixon Doctrine. He asked the Prime Minister whether he and his colleagues in Asia thought that in leaving Vietnam the United States was leaving Asia to its fate and would cease to play a role in helping countries like Cambodia.

The Prime Minister said that from what he had heard, opinion about the Nixon Doctrine was very divided. For his part and on behalf of the Cambodian people, he had said and wished to reiterate that they were confident and much admired President Nixon's courage in seeking a rapprochement and a dialogue between Communist China and the United States.

In other words, asked the President, the idea of a dialogue did not worry the Prime Minister.

On the contrary, the Prime Minister replied. He and his people were for universality. Moreover, his was an Asian nation, condemned to stay on in Asia, near a China with 750,000,000 people.

President Nixon then asked whether that meant that the Prime Minister did not share the concern of some that the meeting between the leaders of the United States and the People's Republic of China would lead to the United States' selling its friends down the river.

The Prime Minister said that it was very hard for him and for his compatriots to predict the future, but, he asked, had not the President said that he would never abandon America's friends, all nations who wanted their freedom and independence?

President Nixon said that was so.

Obviously, said the Prime Minister, he was "very small" and could not predict the outcome of the President's talks with Chou En-lai or Mao Tse-tung. But he did know, on the strength of two years as Ambassador to Peking, that the Chinese felt frustrated. They were a people who thought they were entitled to something in Asia and the world. For example, in the matter of peace in Southeast Asia, the Chinese talked of "Asianization," without any reference to the Geneva Agreements. If that line of thinking were to be maintained, then that would concern the Cambodians very much.

By "Asianization," the President asked, they meant Chinese domination; yes, said the Prime Minister.

The President then asked if the United States must continue to be a Pacific power. Must it therefore continue to maintain a physical presence in Asia?

Yes, replied the Prime Minister, and that was not just his view but that of all the free Asian peoples.

The President asked whether the Prime Minister thought it would be enough for us to have sea power and air power there, or did we need to have significant ground forces in Asia?

The Prime Minister felt that he could not really reply offhand, but that he could say that the Cambodians would want both U.S. air and sea power, on the one hand, and ground power on the other. Even though there were to be no intervention, and knowing the difficulties with the U.S. Congress the Cambodians did not want American soldiers to help them, they nonetheless did need the support of the U.S. troops behind them. This, according to what the Prime Minister had heard, was a concern shared by some of Cambodia's neighbors and other Asian nations.

The President next asked about the situation of Japan. Was there concern about Japan's future role, or was it now welcome in Southeast Asia as a peaceful power?

The Prime Minister replied that Japan was accepted now as an economic leader and in the future might be accepted as a leader from other standpoints. The Cambodians believed that Japan must play a true role in Southeast Asia.

The President asked which, from the standpoint of Cambodia, a very important but relatively small country, the Prime Minister feared most: the possibility of Chinese domination or aggression, or the possibility of Japanese domination or aggression?

The Prime Minister completely ruled out any concern about Japan. Although Japan had had a militarist reputation and did commit aggression in Asia, it had evolved since World War II. On the other hand, China constituted a permanent danger in Asia.²

The President added that he should also have mentioned North Vietnam, to which the Prime Minister responded that North Vietnam in fact feared China even more than Cambodia; after all, North Vietnam was closer to China.

The President asked whether the Cambodians feared the U.S.S.R. The Prime Minister said that although the U.S.S.R. had helped the North Vietnamese in the war, he thought the Russians were afraid of the Chinese too.

The President then gave the Prime Minister the following assurances:

1. The United States was not getting out of Asia; the United States would maintain a presence in those areas where it was appropriate to do so. He was speaking of a naval, air, and ground presence.

2. It was necessary that the non-Communist nations of Asia threatened by their neighbors take the major burden of defending themselves, as Cambodia was doing. That was the Nixon Doctrine. The United States would help economically and militarily, but the prime responsibility had to rest with the people concerned.

3. As for our actions in regard to Vietnam, the United States withdrawal should not be misinterpreted. We had been phasing the withdrawal in such a way that when we left, the South Vietnamese would be able to defend themselves.

There were some in the United States who said we must get out of Vietnam and then out of Asia. That was not the President's view, and he disagreed with that thinking. The United States had not lost 45,000 men to then turn around and stop playing a role as a Pacific power.

² The version sent to the Department of State excluded this and the preceding paragraph.

The reason that we had a role as a Pacific power (and our motivation was different from that of certain other countries in the region) was not because of any desire for domination or economic or colonialist exploitation, but because we believed that each nation had to be able to defend and maintain its independence in the area surrounding the heartland of Asia, China, and that was essential to peace in Asia. If Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, or Southeast Asia were to be swallowed up by their big neighbor, that would not serve the interests of those peoples, who wanted to be independent, nor would it serve the interests of peace.

We wanted good relations with the People's Republic of China, the President continued, but we wanted to maintain our commitments to the neighboring countries in that area. That was not meant in an aggressive or belligerent way or as a threat, but because the existence of many free Asian nations would provide a better opportunity for peace in the future than an Asia dominated solely by one country, regardless of which country that was.

The Prime Minister thanked the President for those assurances, which was what he had come for. He added that he thought that a rapprochement or talks with China could certainly help to arrive at a positive solution to the problem of world peace in general, and of peace in Southeast Asia in particular.

President Nixon then asked the Prime Minister to convey his best regards to the Chief of State, Cheng Heng, and to His Excellency Lon Nol.

As Dr. Kissinger well knew, the President had the most pleasant memories of his trip to Cambodia 18 years ago. He took away with him the remembrance of a peaceful, hospitable, and good people, a people who had the right to be free. That was why he had continued to support our economic and military assistance programs in Cambodia, many times over the strenuous objections of members of the United States Congress. He wished to assure the Prime Minister that he would continue, to the best of his ability, to support Cambodia's efforts to defend itself against the aggressors, not only because it served the interests of peace but because the Cambodian people had a special place in his heart as a result of his visit there.

The Prime Minister thanked the President for his kind words and promised to convey his greetings to his Chief of State and Marshal Lon Nol.

He assured the President that Cambodia recognized that it was a key element in the problem of Southeast Asia and that it had to make every effort to help itself with, of course, the assistance of friends such as President Nixon. The Cambodians were resolved to regain their territorial integrity and freedom. And in that connection, the Prime Minister had one parting wish to express on behalf of all his people: If

peace negotiations were to eventuate, they would want to go back to the formula of the Indochina Conference, of the Geneva Agreements. The Agreements were something they could rely upon; they were valid international agreements which gave Cambodia its territorial integrity and freedom and offered the country guarantees. It was for that reason that Cambodia had taken a cautious attitude with respect to the People's Republic of China and had not committed itself diplomatically to Taiwan, knowing the PRC to be a signatory of the Geneva Agreements.³

³ Sirik Matak also met with Rogers on August 10, a report of which is in telegram 147225 to Phnom Penh, August 12. Matak met with Agnew on August 12 and a memorandum of conversation was prepared. (Both in National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 7 CAMB)

243. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, August 12, 1971, 1042Z.

12885. Deliver opening business to Ambassador Bunker and Dep Asst Sec Sullivan from Berger. Subj: Meeting With Minh. Ref: A. Saigon 12801. B. State 146980.²

1. I met with General Minh this morning for two hours and twenty minutes. He had Ton That Thien with him and I was accompanied by political officer Richard Thompson.

2. Minh opened by saying he had long felt the elections would be dishonest, and when he last spoke to Ambassador Bunker he already had proof in the form of a secret document circulated to province chiefs setting out in detail what they should do to insure Thieu's election. Picking a document out of a folder Minh said, "Here is the evidence that the government has no intention of permitting an honest election. I have had it for three months. I will give you a copy but you must not let President Thieu know you have this or show it to President Thieu."

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David, Cables, October 1969–December 31, 1971. Secret; Immediate; Exdis.

² Neither telegram was found.

3. I asked Minh if he had given any thought to the possibility the document might be a forgery. I said forged documents are common in elections, and, turning to Thien, I said he would recall the famous Zinoviev letter which figured so prominently in a British election in the 1920s. I said could this possibly be a Communist-created document which was designed not just to discredit Thieu, but the elections and the whole constitutional system.

4. Minh brushed this aside saying he had personally received the document from a province chief. I asked if the copy he was supplying me was a Xerox of the original. He said my copy was a retype. (Later in the conversation when I returned to the validity of the document, he said seven or eight province chiefs have given him the same document, which he had returned to them, and he had also received a copy "from a member of President Thieu's staff." I said I was under the impression he had said that the document called for its return after the Presidential election. Was the copy in his possession the actual one received by the province chief? He said no it was a copy of the original, which was back in the hands of the province chief.)

5. We are having the document translated and will cable it soonest.

6. Speaking from a shorter paper, Minh then listed some of the main items in the document: Directions on how to organize the electorate, locating voting stations in remote and inaccessible places; stuffing the ballot box in advance; how to carry out multiple voting; arresting and intimidating opposition cadres and supporters; etc. (I am having Thompson spell out this in detail from his notes and will forward a supplement to this para, also some of the events which Minh said are already taking place.)

7. Minh said for the last six months Thieu has used the government's administrative apparatus to prepare for a guaranteed result. He said he also had other documents in his possession to prove this: Documents circulated by the Ministries of Interior, Information, the secret police, the military special services, and others. The original election law was unconstitutional, but Thieu dominates every branch of the government including the Supreme Court which found the law valid. What chance, Minh said again, was there for an honest election in these circumstances, and what does constitutional government mean when all organs of government are under Thieu's control?

8. Minh said our advisers in the field surely must know of the existence of these documents, and of the orders being carried out by province chiefs, district chiefs, Phung Hoang chiefs, RD cadres, and other government officials to deliver the vote in both the lower house and Presidential elections. I said we have not heard anything of any documents, nor had we much evidence of the actions which he had described.

9. Minh said the elimination of Ky was done by underhanded and illegal means and is further evidence that the elections will be rigged. Mr. Nha has already told the press that the outcome of the Presidential election will be 55 percent to 45 percent, and that it does not matter whether Minh runs or not. (He repeated this several times during the talk.)

10. Minh said in view of the way the situation has developed there is no purpose in his continuing the campaign. Most of his supporters are now urging him to announce his withdrawal, and the question he must answer is whether to run or not. Before deciding he wants me to send this document to Ambassador Bunker and to Washington and to ascertain their views of "its importance". He also wishes to know, if he does not run, will this have "bad effects" in the United States. If the U.S. does not think it is bad for him to withdraw, he will withdraw. He does not want to do anything that would damage the friendship of the U.S. toward Viet-Nam.

11. I said I wish to speak to him very frankly. The elections which were coming up were of the greatest importance to Viet-Nam and to the United States. All the reports we had indicated that General Minh was a very strong candidate, with wide support in the country, and that he would get a great many votes. Minh interrupted me to say yes, he knows that, but will he win. I said I did not know who would win, but it was evident that he was going to give President Thieu a real race.

12. I said we were getting reports that Minh's uncertainty about running was having a demoralizing effect on his supporters and cadres and that people were stopping contributions to his campaign because of the fear that he would withdraw. It was essential to Viet-Nam's political evolution and development and to future stability that there be a contested election in which people would be given an opportunity to register their views. I said, if he withdraws and there is no contest, what is the consequence for Viet-Nam? Minh replied the consequences would be very serious and he could not predict what would happen. I said Viet-Nam and the U.S. had already had one experience of government anarchy and turmoil after the overthrow of Diem in 1963. Neither Viet-Nam nor the U.S. could afford another such experience. There is much talk now of coups, and I wanted him to know that if there was another coup it would be impossible for the U.S. to continue to support Viet-Nam. He said he was aware of that. On the other hand, he said, if he takes part in an election whose outcome is fixed in advance, he will be condemned by the people for letting himself be put in that position. It would be better for him to stand aside and maintain his prestige in order to give the people hope for the future.

13. I said in 1967 after four years of turmoil, Viet-Nam had an election under a new constitution, and during the last four years there has

been a substantial measure of political stability, evolution and progress. There have been local, provincial and senate elections. Many had predicted that these would not be fair, yet after the event there were very few complaints. There were many charges that in the selection of candidates for the lower house in the coming election, many would be disqualified, but in the end very few were barred. In the lower house elections, An Quang hopes to win 40 to 50 seats which will make it the largest bloc in the lower house. There is an imperative need for organized political parties both supporting and opposing the government and there is a real possibility that this can be done in the next few years. I said to Minh that he was the only and obvious opposition leader who could help strengthen and develop the political process, but if he withdrew, the country would again drift aimlessly without organized parties. If he won in the coming election he would be the head of a great political force, if he should lose, he would still be the leader of a very great political force. He had a heavy responsibility to the country and to himself to run in order to take Vietnam into the next stage of political development. Only the Communists would benefit if he withdrew.

14. Minh said he recognized his responsibility, he recognized the needs of the country, and he recognized the dangers. But in the Vietnamese context he must tell me the Vietnamese would never understand his running in an election where the outcome was fixed in advance. He was already out of money to continue the campaign, and how could he appeal for funds in these circumstances.

15. I asked him why he does not seek a private meeting with Thieu to discuss the situation. He said he knows Thieu better than anyone and it would do no good.

16. The anti-climax of all this came at the end when Minh said he hoped I could get a reply to his questions as soon as possible. Time was running out. He had to make a decision by August 24, since he would forfeit his deposit of 2 million piasters unless he withdrew before that date. He asked when Ambassador Bunker would return. I said I had no firm date, but it would be in a few days or early next week.

17. Since writing the foregoing I heard that Minh gave the British Ambassador a copy of the document, and presumably others in the diplomatic corps will have it soon. The Vietnamese press this morning mentioned that General Minh had documents to prove the government's intention to rig the election. This came from Ton That Thien who told the press yesterday Minh has documents ordering province chiefs to paralyze Minh's election apparatus and is gathering more such documents to use when necessary. It is only a matter of time before the U.S. press will be playing the story.

244. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between Secretary of Defense Laird and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, August 12, 1971, 12:15 p.m.

L: Something came up over here . . . I haven't cut in all the people at State—Sullivan hasn't been briefed as far as the logistics build-up in Vietnam. Dave was in the WSAG meeting the other day² and didn't think he should point out we were transferring the A-1's by September.

K: You can't do that. That was not to be done!

L: The President's order that I received said transfer those aircraft programmed by 1972.

K: It was not the intention to take them away from Laos.

L: You are sure of that?

K: I am positive, but I will check.

L: These are in Thailand.

K: I am positive this was not his intention.

L: I interpreted it . . . but it needs no interpretation . . . that all those planned for delivery to South Vietnam . . .

K: I am sure the President didn't focus on this. He meant equipment in Vietnam.

L: Only equipment in Vietnam? We are transferring a lot of stuff from the U.S.

K: That's all right—but not from Laos.

L: I have 22 ships loading. But Dave felt he shouldn't discuss it with the WSAG group.

K: That was good of Dave, but I am sure he didn't mean taking away from Laos. You had better cancel that part of it.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 11, Chronological File. No classification marking.

² See Document 241.

L: We better get to the Vietnamese. I think we should sit down and go over the logistics movements I am making.

K: We better do that. Let me get back to you this afternoon.³

³ No record of another conversation on August 12 was found. Kissinger and Laird spoke about the issue of troop levels on August 13, 12:30 p.m. According to a transcript of their conversation, Kissinger insisted that “11 or 13 divisions is the issue. We have to have one in Hawaii.” Laird assured him that “if we have 13 divisions there will be one in Hawaii. No problem with that.” Laird ended the conversation by stating he wished they could have met with the President that afternoon but “of course if the President is busy we will do it another time.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 11, Chronological File)

245. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, August 16, 1971.

SUBJECT

My Meeting With the North Vietnamese, August 16, 1971

I met again with the North Vietnamese on August 16.² It was essentially a holding action, with Le Duc Tho still in Hanoi.

They have apparently not yet made their decision about accepting our political formula, a decision which must be very anguishing for them. Nonetheless, they are clearly anxious not to break off the channel and they are paying some price.

—Thuy made a point of praising the fact that we gave them our various points in writing. We did it to make sure there was a comprehensive record: Thuy claimed it was a step forward.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1039, Files for the President, Vietnam Negotiations, HAK II 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Printed from an unsigned copy. Kissinger forwarded a slightly different version to Rogers under a covering memorandum, August 17, on which there is a note indicating that Rogers read and returned it that day. (Ibid., Box 861, Camp David Memos, July–Dec 1971)

² A memorandum of conversation is *ibid.*, Box 866, For the President's Files—Lord, Negotiations, CD 1971 Dr. Kissinger, 1 of 2.

—Thuy praised the new formulation of our withdrawal pledge, even though it only rephrased what I had already told them.

—He said that the political problem is still unsettled and that our withdrawal deadlines are far apart, but that the other issues, including the ceasefire, can be resolved.

—He made a shift in their POW position, agreeing to the exchange of lists at the time of settlement and also, in effect, agreeing to release *all* our men held *throughout* Indochina. This pretty well pins down agreement on this question.

Despite the absence of a breakthrough, I agreed to their suggestion to meet again in four weeks, on September 13. I did so for the following reasons:

- We are improving our already good negotiating record. We had to give them an opportunity to consider our new version.
- We have a channel if they want to settle, and which forces them continually to review and modify their position.
- We may keep them from escalating during the electoral campaign.
- We have a good justification should we retaliate if they do escalate.
- I must come to Paris anyway to work out the details of my interim visit to Peking and the announcement of your visit.³
- We have nothing to lose, except my 36 hours of inconvenience, and we achieve nothing by breaking off now (they are not keeping us from anything we want to do.).

What Happened

—I began the meeting by tabling our new eight points (attached at Tab A)⁴ as what we would consider an agreed statement of principles fair to both sides. It essentially represents an amalgam of our original seven points and their nine points, recording all the progress made to date and suggested formulations on remaining issues.

It included a withdrawal deadline of August 1, 1972, provided we signed a final agreement by November 1, 1971. On the political questions I gathered together all the statements we had already said we would be prepared to make, e.g., our neutrality in the South Vietnamese election; willingness to abide by the political process; international

³ This paragraph was not included in the version sent to Rogers.

⁴ Not attached but the points are in the memorandum of conversation; see footnote 2, above.

neutrality for South Vietnam; limitations on aid to both Vietnams; and eventual reunification.

—As a separate understanding I repeated the pledge we made last time to ask Congress for about a \$7 billion aid package, including at least \$2 billion for North Vietnam, after a settlement.

—Thuy began his remarks on a very hard note, asserting that we had not maintained our agreements to refrain from escalation, to keep the channel secret, and to deal directly with Hanoi.⁵

- He accused us of bombing raids against North Vietnam, including B-52 raids.

- He said your press conference statement about “established channels” gave away the secrecy of our talks.⁶

- He said (without giving specifics) that we were trying to deal with them through intermediaries rather than directly.

—I replied in the toughest language I have ever used with them, accusing Thuy of having brought me there under false pretexts if all he was planning was to repeat the propaganda arguments he used at the Hotel Majestic.

- I said that we were not conducting bombing raids against North Vietnam, particularly B-52’s, and were exercising military restraint on our allies, but that the North Vietnamese were violating our understanding by a road through the DMZ and other build-ups in the area. I reinforced this after the end of our formal meeting when I told Thuy that an attack in the area could have drastic consequences.

- I said that your press conference statement could refer to any possible contacts and was an effort to set the record straight in the light of their continuing propaganda claims that we had not responded seriously to Mme. Binh’s seven points.

- I said that we were dealing with them directly, although I had informed the Chinese of the general nature of our talks while in Peking (thought not since). As for the Russians, I only confirmed what Dobrynin told me Hanoi had reported in Moscow. I accused them of making debating points rather than dealing seriously with the issues.⁷

—Thuy backed off, saying that all negotiators had to follow instructions.

⁵ The last clause was not included in the version sent to Rogers.

⁶ The President held a news conference on August 4 during which he said, “We are very actively pursuing negotiations on Vietnam in established channels.” See *Public Papers: Nixon, 1971*, pp. 849–861.

⁷ Only the last sentence in this paragraph was included in the version sent to Rogers.

—After a long break, he read a prepared statement in which he made the following points:

- He complained that our withdrawal deadline of nine months was too long, but he indicated that this was a subject which could be discussed.

- He was hard on remaining technical and logistic personnel, saying it was a question of principle that all American military and technical personnel should leave.

- He agreed that lists of POW's should be presented on the day an agreement is signed, and said that all military and civilians captured during the war would be returned (which he later expanded, under questioning, to imply that they would "use influence" with their allies to get them to return our men elsewhere in Indochina).

- He then returned to the political issue, saying that our pledge to remain neutral in the South Vietnamese election would have no effect. To reinforce this, he said that your recent press conference statement that we would remain neutral appears to have had no effect on Thieu, who was still using all his machinery to win.

- He emphasized Hanoi's and the NLF's desire for a neutral South Vietnam, with a government that was neither Communist nor allied with the U.S.

—I told Thuy that we did not quarrel with this objective, but that we differed on how to bring it about. We could not interfere in the South Vietnamese political process, but we felt that a reiteration of statements of neutrality, reinforced by our pledge to pull out forces and to accept other proposed restrictions on our activities, would have the result of opening up the political process in South Vietnam.

—I added that I did not consider our differences on points 1 and 2 (withdrawal and POWs) to be matters of principle, but issues that could be resolved once we had reached a political understanding. I said we would adjust the date of our pull-out slightly to take account of their goodwill on other issues. I also said that our remaining technical and logistic personnel would be confined to agreed numbers and areas, and would themselves be pulled out at an agreed time. (I was prepared to be more specific on numbers and functions but saved this for the future in light of their lack of movement on the political issue.)

—I asked Thuy what he proposed we should do at this point, and he indicated we should both think further and should fix another meeting.

—Thuy then asked me what I thought the outlook was for the South Vietnamese election. I said that it seemed certain Thieu would win, unless there were an agreement of the kind we had proposed, in which case Minh would have a chance. Thuy said he felt he needed a

“guarantee” that Thieu would be replaced, and he used a very soft formulation indicating that the PRG would be prepared to deal with any ruler in South Vietnam other than Thieu who favored peace, independence, and neutrality. I told him we could not collude in the overthrow of Thieu, though we would do what we could to guarantee a free election.

—After some more exchanges, we agreed to meet again on September 13. Thuy also asked when Ambassador Porter would arrive in Paris and I told him that he would be present for the September 2 session of the talks.⁸

⁸ In an August 16 telephone conversation with Nixon, Kissinger briefed him on the meeting. He claimed that both sides were moving toward settlement, but that he “was brutal to them; I have never talked so brutally to anybody.” Kissinger claimed that Xuan Thuy insisted on holding another meeting. Nixon asked if he would go, to which Kissinger responded, “And that will be it!” He added later, though, that he felt Hanoi would not settle until November and commented at the end: “They are not really getting a damn thing out of it. They have fought 25 years only to have Thieu still in office.” Nixon asked again if Kissinger thought they would settle after the election, and Kissinger said that he did because “they have no place to go.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Chronological File, Box 11)

246. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, August 17, 1971.

Kissinger: I don’t expect much to happen until the election.² And I won’t go—

Nixon: You really think you should see them [North Vietnamese] the 13th? But, we agreed to it, so that’s that—

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: I guess it’s—

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 566–14. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. The exchange is part of a larger conversation, 2:52–3:23 p.m.

² A reference to South Vietnam’s upcoming October 3 Presidential election.

Kissinger: —it was a close call. The reason, as I put in my memo to you,³ I decided to go along with it is was we've given them eight points. If they don't reply, then I've gone to two meetings without Le Duc Tho present. It's another kick in the teeth by them. They haven't replied to our eight points. If they attack in the meantime, we can say they attacked while they—while we had offered them eight points and hit them. If they don't attack, then we have got through the Vietnamese election campaign without being hit—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —without a big offensive. And I have to go anyway to set up my trip and to get the details be—begun for yours. So, for all these reasons it's a— it's a close decision, though.

Nixon: Yeah—

Kissinger: I will not go again after that one—

Nixon: You know, I wouldn't. I—It seems to me that—I mean, just going over there and yakking around, you know, and they go over the same ground, and maybe, maybe—well, we'll settle one little, miserable point—

Kissinger: Well, it has one advantage. If we go on the 11th or the 13th—I gave them these two alternates—it has—it has—and then, we don't settle it, which I don't think we will, then, on the 15th and 16th they get hit with that Russian announcement.⁴

Nixon: Um-hmm—

Kissinger: That's going to be a real jolt to them. And then—

Nixon: You still think the China thing's going, right?

Kissinger: Oh, they're—

Nixon: —despite the fact they haven't agreed yet—

Kissinger: I agree with Connally. When I told Connally about the China thing, he said to me: "It will make a settlement more slow but more assured." And he's absolutely right. They are—I think part of their stalling is to show us that they were not pressured into it by the Chinese.

Nixon: They can see—in other words, they will see inevitability.

Kissinger: What they will see, Mr. President, is that their two big allies are dealing with us before the war in Vietnam has ended. Both of them have invited you to their capitals while the war is still going on. Both of them, no matter what they tell them, have a vested inter-

³ Document 245.

⁴ Nixon and Kissinger intended to publicly announce in mid-September that American and Soviet leaders would meet in May 1972. As it turned out, the announcement was not made until October 12, 1971. See *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 1, footnote 2.

est to make sure that they don't screw it all up because they obviously have their own fish to fry.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: So even—and even if the Soviet Union doesn't do anything, it—in bringing direct pressure, the mere fact that they are seeing you, that they are pushing you—pushing them on page 50, again,⁵ for a month or two, while people are yakking, then my trip to Peking is again. We've got them off the front pages—no matter what happens—until the middle of November.

[Omitted here is discussion related to the People's Republic of China.]

Kissinger: I mean, we are really within sight, now. If I were in Hanoi, I just wouldn't—first of all, we have—we've made Vietnam a small country in Asia.

Nixon: Hmm.

Kissinger: That, already, changes the ballgame. Johnson—it was the only foreign policy Johnson had, and, therefore, the slightest twitch was a headline.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: I mean, now, if they start twitching and screwing up the peace trips of a President, what can they do?

Nixon: Who's?

Kissinger: I mean, the North—the Vietnamese. Supposing they start an attack while you're preparing to go to Peking, which would be the Tet period.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: I wouldn't bet that the American public would turn against you.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: They might turn against them at that point.

Nixon: Yeah. The American public isn't going to like anymore so-called "escalation." That's the problem we've got.

Kissinger: I think they'll settle this winter—this fall. November is now what I think. By—they're not going to go the route. [pause] At the very least, if it isn't settled—

Nixon: Oh, at that time, we're ready to exchange prisoners for termination.

Kissinger: That's what I mean.

Nixon: And, so, we just say, "All right—"

⁵ I.e., to the back, or least important, pages of the newspaper.

Kissinger: Maybe, maybe towards—what we may have to do—

Nixon: Plus cease-fire.

Kissinger: We'll have to see in November, Mr. President. You may want to have just a two-month withdrawal schedule if the negotiations are close to, to succeeding. But we, we—

Nixon: You mean, like—what do you mean? Two months? Get out then—?

Kissinger: Instead of announcing the whole thing, just announce a two-month increment to keep the negotiations going. But we don't have to be safe—decide that now.

Nixon: Well, we'll see you later.

247. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to Secretary of State Rogers and Secretary of Defense Laird¹

Washington, August 18, 1971.

SUBJECT

Herbicides in Vietnam

The President has reviewed the memoranda of the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State, respectively dated May 13² and June 24,³ 1971, on the subject of herbicide use in Vietnam. The President has made the following decisions:

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 156, Vietnam Country Files, Viet Aug 71. Secret. A copy was sent to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Kissinger sent this memorandum to Nixon under a covering memorandum, August 13, in which he argued that while political disadvantages of extending the phase-out of the program into December would be significant, the use of herbicides to protect U.S. troops was the overriding concern. Nixon initialed Kissinger's August 18 covering memorandum, indicating his approval.

² *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume E-2, Documents on Arms Control and Non-proliferation, 1969–1972, Document 229. According to a transcript of a telephone conversation between Kissinger and Laird on August 17, 8:25 a.m., the Secretary of Defense inquired, "I wonder if the President understands the problem I am having on herbicides around fire bases." Kissinger explained that the President had just extended operations until December 1 but that Laird had not yet received the memorandum. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 11, Chronological File)

³ *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume E-2, Documents on Arms Control and Non-proliferation, 1969–1972, Document 231.

—The planned phase-out of the herbicide operations in Vietnam and, as necessary, the introduction of alternate means for clearing perimeters be completed as rapidly as possible and not later than December 1, 1971.

—Until December 1, 1971, subject to the outcome of the current Geneva Protocol review⁴ and the NSSM 112 study,⁵ American Embassy Saigon and COMUSMACV have joint authority to use herbicides around fire bases and U.S. installations when considered essential for the protection of U.S. and allied forces in those cases where other means are not possible or available. (Use will continue to be restricted to perimeter of fire bases and U.S. installations, and conducted by only helicopter or ground-based spray equipment under the same regulations as apply in the United States. Alternative means should be utilized whenever feasible.)

—The question of whether the U.S. should assist the South Vietnamese to develop a herbicide capability should be considered as a separate issue, not linked to the U.S. phase-out program. Pending the President's decision on any proposed plan for such assistance, there should be no actions or statements which would in any way encourage the South Vietnamese to acquire or develop a herbicide capability.

The Department of Defense should prepare an appropriate public release, in coordination with the Department of State and the White House.

Henry A. Kissinger

⁴ Kissinger ordered an interagency review on June 28 to plan for the Senate's advice and consent to ratify the 1925 Geneva Protocol, an agreement to forswear the use of all chemical and biological weapons. His memorandum to Rogers and Laird is *ibid.*, Document 232.

⁵ Nixon issued NSSM 112 on January 7; see *ibid.*, Document 210.

248. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, August 19, 1971.

K: Sorry to disturb you.

P: It's all right, fine, no problem.

K: I wanted you to be aware of something. We've just had a Reuters dispatch that Minh has withdrawn from the race in Vietnam and that will mean that some of our people are going to be anguishing all over the place.² Now, I feel that part of this . . . maybe Thieu was unwise in some of the things he did, but I think partly it's also rigged by the Buddhists and the Communists and this would explain why they didn't settle at the last meeting, that they knew this was coming. And what we would like to do is to put a lid on comments on our side for a while . . .

P: Total, total.

K: . . . and see perhaps whether we could get Thieu to get a new election law and, above all, I don't think we should turn on Thieu at this late moment.

P: Turn on him? Never, never . . . I hope never.

K: Well, that's the trend in the State Department.

P: Well, the hell with them.

K: They see in this a God-sent opportunity to get rid of him.

P: No, we must never do that. It's like what they did killing Diem.

K: Exactly.

P: Never. Never, never, never. They're to shut up. They're to say nothing without my approval.

K: Exactly. Well, if I may do that, Mr. President . . .

P: Fine. You tell him that's the order and . . . it isn't too bad you know. The Communists let Thieu win, so he wins.

K: It's no crime to have an anti-Communist win an election . . . to run . . . But we may be able to get another . . . you know get the election deferred, get a new electoral law or whatever. At any rate I

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 11, Chronological File. No classification marking. The conversation took place at an unknown time in the evening.

² Minh announced his decision on the morning of August 20. (*The New York Times*, August 20, 1971, pp. 1–2)

don't think we should now give the impression that we are turning on Thieu.

P: I'm not sure we ought to defer the election. I mean, you know, let's get it over with, don't you think.

249. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Saigon, August 20, 1971, 0307Z.

583. Ref WHS 1077.²

1. I had long and explicit talk with Thieu whom I was not able to reach until 1800 August 19.³ This was followed by two hour conversation with General Minh.

2. I went over with Thieu my talking paper, which I had sharpened up, point by point, emphasizing the absolute necessity of immediate and decisive action on his part to keep Minh in the race. Thieu was highly critical of Minh's tactics and ultimate purposes. He indicated, however, willingness to take measures I had suggested. This is clearly now too late in view of Minh's withdrawal this morning.

3. My conversation with Minh was long and inconclusive although when I left I felt I had his assurance that he would give the matter of his continued candidacy further review today. My impression, however, was that he had little stomach for the contest. Information I have received now is that his decision was made at midnight following my conversation with him.

4. I have just received text of President's letter to Thieu⁴ which I intend to use promptly and is most helpful.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 872, For the President's Files, Winston Lord, China Trip, Vietnam, Vietnam Elections. Top Secret; Flash; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only.

² Not found.

³ See Document 250.

⁴ Not printed. (National Archives, Nixon President Materials, NSC Files, Box 766, Presidential Correspondence, Viet-Nam, President Thieu Corres)

5. I intend to say to Thieu that he can win an uncontested election and lose the support of the United States. It will be up to him now to see that Ky's candidacy is validated.

6. I regret to have to give this highly unsatisfactory report. I will be sending full account of talks with Thieu and Minh.⁵

7. Best regards.

⁵ Bunker reported on his meeting with Minh in telegram 13418 from Saigon, August 20. He pressed Minh to reconsider withdrawing because of the destabilizing effects it could have on the country and U.S. public support, adding that he had asked Tran Van Linh, Chief Justice of South Vietnam's Supreme Court, to delay a decision on Ky's appeal until August 23 so that he, Bunker, could convince Ky to stay in the race. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 872, For the President's Files, Lord, China Trip, Vietnam, Vietnam Elections)

250. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, August 20, 1971, 0900Z.

13387. Subject: Meeting With President Thieu, August 19, 1971.

1. I was unable to reach Thieu until 1800 August 19² when I had long and explicit talk with him going over with him paragraph by paragraph text of my talking paper. Text in immediate following telegram.³

2. Thieu followed closely my presentation, taking notes as I proceeded. I pointed out to him:

a) That the United States Government's case for supporting South Viet-Nam has been all along based on the fundamental premise that we wanted the people of South Viet-Nam to be able to determine their own future. If that premise disappears the fundamental basis for our support no longer exists.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 872, For the President's Files, Winston Lord, China Trip, Vietnam, Vietnam Elections. Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only; Nodis; Cherokee.

² See Document 249.

³ The text was sent in telegram 13388 from Saigon, August 20. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 872, For the President's Files, Winston Lord, China Trip, Vietnam, Vietnam Elections)

b) That the exclusion of Vice President Ky⁴ is viewed as contrary to the spirit if not the letter of the law. Belief is widespread that this was planned by him long in advance and executed with deliberate intent.

c) Even more disturbing is the threat of General Minh to withdraw his candidacy and the distinct likelihood he will do so.

d) Documents had come into General Minh's possession directing province chiefs to do whatever is necessary to defeat him and arrange the election in Thieu's favor. We have confirmation of the fact that the document was delivered to province chiefs and are satisfied that it is authentic.

e) General Minh has evidence some voters are being given duplicate voting cards and claims that his own workers have been harassed, threatened and interfered with in many provinces.

3. I said that if General Minh withdrew, the election itself will become a futile exercise. The people are entitled to a choice as between candidates and issues. Unless they are given that choice, the election will be considered a mockery. In such circumstances, I could give Thieu no assurance that the American Congress will vote the funds which will enable President Nixon to continue his policy of support for the GVN.

4. I said that unless there is a real contest, Thieu's own position will be seriously weakened within Viet-Nam. His moral and legal authority to govern will come into question. Divisiveness, not unity needed to face a determined enemy, will result.

5. I said that immediate and decisive action on his part is essential:

—To get word to the Supreme Court that you will not object if they find reasonable grounds for validating those endorsements of Vice President Ky which have not yet been certified.

—To take the initiative and have a talk with General Minh. Although I was going to try to persuade Minh to stay in the race, I did not think my efforts alone would be effective.

—To issue a written and publicized order to appointed officials throughout the country that it is their duty to insure the fairness of the elections, that they must be impartial to all candidates, that government resources shall be made available on an equal and equitable basis to all candidates and that harassment and intimidation of candidates and their workers is strictly prohibited.

⁴ On August 5, the South Vietnamese Supreme Court rejected Ky's application for candidacy because a number of the certificates from provincial councilmen he needed to qualify were already signed for Thieu. Ky indicated that he would appeal the decision because some of the councilmen had been tricked into signing for Thieu. (*The New York Times*, August 6, 1971, pp. 1, 4)

—Offer to provide Minh with planes, helicopters and other necessary facilities at the provincial and district level to carry on his campaign.

—To repudiate those who issued the orders to the province chiefs and the document itself.

6. I added that the concern which I had previously expressed to him had been confirmed and heightened by my consultations in Washington. Anything less than an honest election, freely and fairly contested, would completely undermine President Nixon's policy of support to Viet-Nam. The consequences could be disastrous for Viet-Nam.

7. Thieu agreed to issue public statement I had suggested. He expressed unfamiliarity with the document containing instructions to the province chiefs and asked me to let him have a copy, which I agreed to do. He said he would investigate and take necessary action.

8. He said that Minh's assertion of the issuance of duplicating voting cards could be correct. This had happened also in 1967 when soldiers away from home had been issued cards and their wives had been given cards for both husband and wife. The Ministry of the Interior has means to check on this and he would see that it did so. With regard to supplying facilities for General Minh, Thieu said the Electoral Council would establish procedures for candidates providing equality regarding number of press conferences, TV and radio time, and means to travel, etc., permitted each candidate. I pointed out to him that this did not cover the situation, since he had means now for travelling around the country whereas Minh did not. His travels, even though in the guise of government business, were in effect campaigning and giving him unfair advantages.

9. Regarding Minh's complaints of unfair practices, Thieu said he should report these to him and he would take remedial action. He complained of the daily unsubstantiated charges by what he referred to as the "anti-fraud committee of the National Assembly" headed by Senator Vu Van Mau, which was making daily unproved accusations of fraud. The committee was not authorized either by law or Assembly action and he had written to the President of the Senate pointing this out. Thieu added that he had met this week with province chiefs of MR 2 and 3, instructing them to provide protection during the campaign and the voting for both the lower house and Presidential elections, that it was the government's purpose to see that both elections were clean and fair despite any statements of calumnies the opposition might make.

10. Thieu said that it seemed clear to him that Minh's leftist supporters were trying to push him to withdraw in order to create difficulties both for Thieu and for the GVN. If Minh loses the election, he will claim that it will be because the election was unfair.

11. I said that regardless of what Thieu might feel about Minh's tactics, it was perfectly clear to me, and it had been for many months, that Thieu would easily win the election, but it was absolutely essential that there be a contest. An uncontested election would be a disaster. Time was running out and he must act immediately to avert it.

12. Since Minh has already made the decision to withdraw,⁵ there remains only the prospect of getting Ky's candidacy validated by the Supreme Court. I will press this on Thieu strongly today.

Bunker

⁵ See footnote 2, Document 248.

251. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker)¹

Washington, August 23, 1971, 2159Z.

WHS 0803. 1. I have discussed the situation with the President in great detail.² Our thinking here is that there are two major considerations. On the one hand, we cannot let candidates who may be objectively weak overthrow their opponent merely by withdrawing from an election they could not win. On the other hand, we cannot have an election which does not offer the South Vietnamese people a choice, a factor which would seem important for Thieu's legitimacy as well as our own domestic situation. We thus lean against his carrying through with an election with only a pro forma opponent on the ballot.

2. In light of these considerations, the President and I believe that our best bet is for Thieu to turn the October election into a genuine referendum. In doing so Thieu might take the following line:

—He had hoped above all to have an open and free election, vigorously contested by responsible opposition leaders. Unfortunately, op-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 872, For the President's Files, Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Vietnam Election. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only.

² Bunker reported to Kissinger in backchannel message 619 from Saigon, August 21, that he met with Ky to convince him to remain in the race, arguing that he would be better able to form a constructive opposition, but Ky was noncommittal. (Ibid.)

position candidates have chosen to withdraw from the electoral test on the basis of trumped up and unsubstantiated charges.

—In view of this turn of events and since Thieu still believes that a clear expression of the popular will is essential for Vietnam's future, he has decided to modify the character of the October election to a simple mandate by which the electorate can register a vote of confidence or no confidence in his regime.

—If the outcome is affirmative, he will then consider that the confidence vote constitutes a mandate to continue in office for a full four year term.

—If the outcome should prove to be a vote of no confidence, Thieu would then resign and call for a new election within 90 days.

3. In conjunction with this rationale, Thieu should concurrently offer both Minh and Ky the full opportunity to campaign on the "confidence and no confidence" issue. In doing so, he would assure both men the full opportunity to campaign actively in an opposition role. This might include the provision of free radio and television time, government helicopters and other auxiliary assets which would tend to insure fairness and equal opportunity to both sides. It is essential that the steps in paragraphs two and three be taken concurrently and the provisions of paragraph 3 be generous.

4. The President and I consider that the foregoing solution would again allow Thieu to seize the initiative. It would enable him to establish his legitimacy, challenge his opponents to a real contest, and be in the position of placing maximum emphasis on the popular will. This course of action would strip both Minh and Ky of the cause celebre that a straight noncontested election process seems to provide them with.

5. We note in your telegram 0657³ that you consider a referendum effectively indistinguishable from a no contest election. It seems to us that the difference is that Thieu could not lose an uncontested election, and that a refusal by Ky and Minh to participate in a referendum would put them clearly on the defensive. At a minimum Thieu's public position would be greatly strengthened.

³ In backchannel message 657 from Saigon, August 23, Bunker outlined the following options: 1) have Thieu conduct a no contest or national referendum, which he believed could lead to chaos and a "tarnished victory" for Thieu; 2) declare a state of emergency and call for new elections within a certain period, which could also create chaos and a tarnished Thieu victory; 3) set a new election date by constitutional amendment, which could prove difficult to do by October 3; and 4) create a caretaker government headed by the GVN House Speaker and hold new elections in 3 months, which Bunker thought the best option if Thieu and Ky decided to act responsibly and offer their resignations. (Ibid.)

6. I recognize that there may be some technical difficulties in adjusting the nature of the election but these appear surmountable from here. There are also risks for Thieu, of course, but in our view these are less than an uncontested election. The odds would seem to favor his winning and his victory would then have substance.

7. Please discuss this alternative urgently with Thieu and assure him in the most solemn terms that the President is determined not to repeat the mistakes of the past by self-defeating U.S. involvement in South Vietnamese internal affairs. But also convey our strongest judgment that the common cause will be strengthened if he takes this course as quickly as possible. He may consider delaying the referendum by a week. This course of action appears to have such overriding advantages compared to other realistic alternatives that you should put it to Thieu in the strongest terms and as expeditiously as possible before he becomes wedded to a less satisfactory solution.⁴

⁴ Bunker held two meetings with Thieu on August 25 to discuss his plans for a referendum and reported on them in backchannel message 692 from Saigon, August 25, backchannel message 714 from Saigon, August 25, and telegram 13853 from Saigon, August 27. (All *ibid.*)

252. Memorandum for the President's File¹

San Clemente, August 24, 1971, 10:45 p.m.

SUBJECT

The President's Meeting with Amb. William J. Porter, New U.S. Chief Delegate to Paris Peace Talks

OTHER PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger

The President met with Ambassador Porter for a discussion of the issues in the Paris negotiations, where the Ambassador was about to take up his post as head of the U.S. delegation.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1025, Presidential/HAK Memcons, MemCon between President and Amb. William J. Porter Re: Paris Peace Talks, Aug. 24, 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting was held in the President's office in the Western White House. According to Nixon's Daily Diary, it ended at 11:28 a.m. (*Ibid.*, White House Central Files)

After welcoming the Ambassador to San Clemente, the President warned the Ambassador to watch the French food when he got to Paris. "My wife watches it for me," Ambassador Porter replied.

The President then began by saying that the course of the negotiations rested on the private contacts that Dr. Kissinger had told the Ambassador about.² These gave us some hope for the future. Under no circumstances, however, should Ambassador Porter discuss these private contacts with anybody in the Department. The Department was just rambling along about the Vietnamese elections.

What could we say about the Vietnamese elections, the President then asked. The Ambassador called recent developments in Saigon unfortunate, and said that we were watching things. The President agreed. These developments were unfortunate not so much because of the facts of what was really happening, but because of their public impact. The Ambassador recommended we take the position that the South Vietnamese were running things themselves and that this was a South Vietnamese internal matter. The strategy of the North Vietnamese, Dr. Kissinger noted, was to try to get us to do what they could not accomplish themselves, namely, overthrow the South Vietnamese Government.

The President stressed that we could not throw up our hands now. He asked Ambassador Porter what the impact would be in Asia if the U.S. suddenly did that. The whole structure of stability in Asia would be irreparably damaged, Ambassador Porter replied. We would lose the respect of Asia, including that of the very people we were trying to reach, like the Chinese and North Vietnamese. The Koreans were an interesting people, he added. Here we had two irreconcilable peoples (the North and South Koreans), and they were now talking to each other. The same thing could happen in Vietnam.

The President asked how Thieu's uncontested election would affect the situation. Wouldn't the other side strengthen its demand to overthrow Thieu? Ambassador Porter noted that both Cabot Lodge and he had been able to stop coups. When Thieu first came in he was thought to be able to last only six weeks. The Ambassador sensed a big change in the comportment of the South Vietnamese now, and a real prospect that they would work out a solution.

As the conversation ended, the President wished Ambassador Porter the best success in the forthcoming negotiations. "I hope you will give the press something to write about," he said.

² According to Kissinger's Record of Schedule, he had a breakfast meeting with Porter, August 24, from 8:35 to 9:25 a.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76) No further record of the meeting has been found.

253. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, September 2, 1971.

SUBJECT

Thieu's Speech

Background

In a nationwide radio and TV address delivered September 2,² President Nguyen Van Thieu affirmed his intention to go forward unopposed with the scheduled October 3 presidential elections.

Thieu said he would consider the October 3 balloting as an expression of confidence or non-confidence in his leadership and policies and that if the results did not "clearly show" that his compatriots had confidence in him, he would "voluntarily not accept" to continue a new 4-year term and would definitely not accept election for another term.

Thieu also said that if entrusted with another 4-year term, he would devote all his "intellect, heart and efforts to restoring peace to the country" and, during the coming 4-year term, after restoring peace, he asked nothing more than to return to civilian life and let his countrymen elect a new leader.

Some Ambiguities

Thieu's speech leaves ambiguous some important details, particularly with respect to voting mechanics. It is not clear precisely how voters will be able to voice a vote of non-confidence. At the moment only Thieu's slate will appear on the ballot. Will voters be offered a choice of casting a "no" ballot or will they register their negative vote by simply not going to the polls? It is also not clear from the speech

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 153, Vietnam Country Files, Viet Sept 71. Secret. Sent for information. Printed from an unsigned copy and there is no indication that Nixon saw the memorandum. Negrofonte forwarded it to Kissinger under a September 2 covering memorandum, which Haig initialed.

² Bunker sent an advance copy of the text in telegram 14150 from Saigon, September 2, and wrote that he had pressed Thieu to guarantee the facilities to the opposition to run their campaign. Instead, Thieu promised that he would plant questions at news conferences in the next few days to spell out the details of how the campaign would be run. Bunker commented that the speech was the best he could get from Thieu. Kennedy forwarded the telegram to Kissinger under a September 2 covering memorandum. (Ibid., Box 119, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam, Cherokee, September 71)

how large the mandate will have to be before Thieu considers it an expression of “clear confidence” by the people.

There seems little doubt that Thieu will be compelled to clarify these points in the coming days in response to pressures and queries from his own body politic.

Withdrawal of Ky and Minh a Matter of Will

Among other important points, Thieu:

—Gave a detailed chronology of election developments from August 7 to date, characterizing the withdrawal of Minh and Ky as a matter of individual freedom “completely subject to their will and their own situation, as well as their political calculations.”

—Forcefully (and for the first time personally) denounced allegations that he had intended to manipulate the elections, calling attention to the honesty of the 1970 Senate elections and the fact that in Sunday’s Lower House elections a number of victorious candidates had earlier said those elections would be fraudulent.

—Rejected Vice President Ky’s proposal that he resign so that new elections could be organized, stating this would be an irresponsible and unconstitutional act which could only create a political void beneficial to the Communists. Thieu said such a step would be the first move towards establishing a coalition government, writing another constitution and setting up a pro-Communist government which would gradually proceed to “engulfing all the South without resorting to bloodshed.”

Reaction from Saigon

It is too early to assess the impact of Thieu’s speech in South Vietnam. Vice-President Ky is already reported to have met with an assortment of oppositionist politicians at his home yesterday and is also known to be casting about for support from within the military. For the moment, however, Thieu appears to be in control of the situation and we cannot tell how strongly opposition might crystalize against his decision to go through with an uncontested election.³

³ Bunker reported to Kissinger in backchannel message 77 from Saigon, September 11, that he met with Thieu to press him to announce the details of the referendum. Thieu provided the following information: a blank or defaced ballot would count as a no confidence vote; if he did not receive 50 percent of the vote he would leave office so that new elections could be organized and he would not run; he would call for large groups of observers; and he would allow the opposition to use the press and hold meetings and, reluctantly, agreed with Bunker to allow them the use of radio and TV. (Ibid., Box 872, For the President’s Files, Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Vietnam Elections)

254. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Paris, September 13, 1971, 11:25 a.m.–1:30 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Xuan Thuy, Chief of North Vietnamese Delegation
Vo Van Sung, North Vietnamese Delegate General in Paris
Phan Hien, Member of North Vietnamese Delegation
North Vietnamese Interpreter
One Other North Vietnamese Official

Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Major General Vernon Walters, Defense Attaché
Winston Lord, NSC Staff
John D. Negroponte, NSC Staff

Dr. Kissinger: The last time I was late. I am early this time.

Xuan Thuy: It is not good to be too late or too early.

Dr. Kissinger: I don't expect the Minister to let me win the war, but could he let me win one small argument? The Minister doesn't want to bear the responsibility for my having an inferiority complex.

You all know Mr. Negroponte. We have sent Mr. Smyser back to school. Mr. Smyser will rejoin us for our twenty-fifth meeting in September of 1972. He has been sent to the university for one year. Mr. Negroponte is on my staff. He does not work for anyone else.

With the change of Ambassadors I want the Minister to know that Ambassador Porter knows about these discussions, but no one else on the delegation. But he is not authorized to discuss them.

Xuan Thuy: I met Ambassador Porter once on September 9th.

Dr. Kissinger: I also understand that the Minister met with Senator McGovern.²

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Box 1039, Files for the President, Vietnam Negotiations, HAK II 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting took place at the North Vietnamese Residence in Paris, 11 Rue Darthe. Kissinger noted in a telephone conversation with Nixon, September 8, 3:05 p.m., that Le Duc Tho had not attended the National Day celebration in Hanoi and may have been on his way to Paris. Kissinger told Nixon, "Then it would be clear something will happen." (Ibid., Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 11, Chronological File)

² In backchannel message 1664 from Paris, September 12, Porter informed Kissinger that Senator McGovern met with Xuan Thuy on September 11 and focused on setting a date to release the POWs. McGovern evidently claimed that the United States did not need to stop all aid to the Thieu government because he would fall anyway once the U.S. troops were withdrawn. In a backchannel message to Porter, Kissinger indicated that Nixon wanted him to "take on McGovern forcefully" at the next session of the Paris Peace Talks. (Both *ibid.*, NSC Files, Box 986, Haig Chronological Files, September 3–13, 1971 [1 of 2])

Xuan Thuy: Yes, I did. He came here and met many people.

Dr. Kissinger: Has the Minister decided which United States candidate he will support in 1972?

Xuan Thuy: That is up to the American people. I am certain you will support President Nixon.

How shall we proceed now?

Dr. Kissinger: I think it is the Minister's turn to open this meeting. I presented our eight points at the beginning of the last meeting.³ How is the Special Adviser getting along?

Xuan Thuy: The Special Adviser is still in Hanoi. He asked that when I see you again to convey his greetings.

So you give me the opportunity to speak first.

We have studied carefully the eight points you put forward the last time on August 16. In our view we think that as in the last time when you put forward your seven points⁴ you did not go directly to the substance of a settlement of the political problem of South Vietnam. You argue that if the two parties could come to agreement on the other principles, then such agreement would affect the political situation in South Vietnam and particularly will affect the forthcoming elections. You said that the U.S. would be neutral in the election for the Lower House as well as the Presidency of South Vietnam. You said that the United States will abstain from supporting any candidate in South Vietnam.

But after the statement of President Nixon about United States neutrality in the election⁵ and after the activities of Ambassador Bunker in South Vietnam, the situation in South Vietnam has been revealed very clearly. Measures of terror and fraud in the Lower House election have been seen by everyone.⁶ The United States has supported fascist and dictatorial acts by Nguyen Van Thieu and has stepped up its

³ See Document 245.

⁴ See Document 207.

⁵ In response to a question at his August 4 press conference on how the GVN election controversies were affecting the peace negotiations, Nixon stated: "Our position is one of complete neutrality in these elections. We have, under Ambassador Bunker's skillful direction, made it clear to all parties concerned that we are not supporting any candidate, that we will accept the verdict of the people of South Vietnam. (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1971*, p. 853)

⁶ In a September 22 memorandum to Nixon, Kissinger noted that the GVN Lower House elections were held on August 31 and although Thieu's supporters maintained a comfortable majority, the opposition, anti-war Buddhist party, An Quang Buddhist, made significant gains. Kissinger believed that the generally vigorous and fair election would help redress the House's poor reputation and even though the opposition would be involved in crafting legislation, it would not be strong enough to threaten Thieu's position. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 157, Vietnam Country Files, Viet Sept 71)

intervention more than ever with a view to preserving the Administration headed by Thieu. The United States has directed the electoral farce in South Vietnam so that the group of Nguyen Van Thieu could win the election.

Now the United States is preparing for the election of Nguyen Van Thieu again to the Presidency. And at the same time the U.S. is persuading other people to run in the election so as to give it a democratic facade. We have laid stress on the change of Nguyen Van Thieu and you have strived to consolidate the Nguyen Van Thieu Administration.

We have repeatedly reiterated that if the United States Government maintains the Nguyen Van Thieu Administration, then we can come to no settlement at all. And we are not alone in saying so. The Vietnamese people as a whole and world opinion hold the same view. The United States actions are just the contrary of United States words.

In my view the eight points which you put forward the last time in the face of the present situation in South Vietnam, these eight points have no ground, no basis. Therefore I would like to ask you how shall we negotiate the political problem now? I wonder what you will be saying on this subject. I am prepared to listen to you.

Another point I would like to take up now is the question of the withdrawal of the United States and other foreign forces from South Vietnam. You said that the terminal date for U.S. troop withdrawal would be August 1, 1972 if an agreement could be signed on November 1, 1971. So you still maintain the period for troop withdrawal is nine months provided that an agreement is reached. And if no agreement is reached, then the nine month period remains. Thus the final date you have given you use only to illustrate your position.

On the other hand, Mr. Special Adviser said that you would leave behind American military advisers and technical personnel. This shows that you are not willing to withdraw the totality of United States forces and that you continue to support and give aid to the Saigon Administration.

Moreover, you insist upon a limit of aid to North Vietnam. This is very absurd and constitutes a violation, an encroachment on the sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. We therefore emphatically reject this proposal.

Therefore what I said in point 1 regarding the total withdrawal of United States forces in 1971 and what you have said in your eight points are still far apart. The last time we expressed our preliminary comments and after careful study of your proposal we have realized more clearly our own views.

As for comment on the other points, I still feel we should concentrate on the questions of withdrawal and the Saigon Administration. The other problems can only be settled easily when we can agree

on these two points. You propose that we should agree on a statement of principles. The great principles include precisely the questions of U.S. troop withdrawal and the Saigon Administration.

Since you put forward your eight points the actual situation has demonstrated our views. I am now awaiting your views.

Dr. Kissinger: Is that all you have to say, or is there anything else?

Xuan Thuy: After a second examination of your proposal I realized that the two crucial points on which we should exchange views thoroughly are the questions of troop withdrawal and the Saigon Administration.

Dr. Kissinger: I appreciate the comments of the Minister which I have already read several times in the protocols of Avenue Kleber. While I recognize the points the Minister made and while I will say one or two things about them, I think they are really beside the point. I know the Minister has read his instructions and so I reply to whoever drafted his instructions. The authors of those instructions know as well as I do . . .

Xuan Thuy: I wonder whether you will be answering personally or on behalf of the White House?

Dr. Kissinger: On behalf of the White House.

Xuan Thuy: If you speak on behalf of the White House, I am prepared to listen to you, but if it is your personal view then I am only prepared to listen partially. Because you say I speak from instructions. Therefore I say I am prepared to listen to the instructions you have received from the White House.

Dr. Kissinger: You will. It is perfectly clear that we did not step up our intervention in South Vietnam. The opposite is true. It is not true that we participated in the electoral process so that President Thieu can win. The opposite is true. We have tried for two months with good will and a serious attitude to implement the propositions which we have advanced. If you had approached us with a serious attitude, you would have seen that we would have made a serious effort to assure that the South Vietnamese people could express their views.

Those who have negotiated with us seriously have found that we carried out the letter and the spirit of every agreement we have made.

But we are getting tired of being accused at every session of trickery and deceit. We recognize that the problem is difficult and we have understanding for your concerns. And we are more than prepared to meet as many of your concerns as we reasonably can. But we demand the same attitude toward ourselves.

It is difficult to believe the seriousness of a Government which has on four occasions in the last year made the special representative of the President come here to Paris without the presence of the representative

of Hanoi. This has happened in fact on five occasions, twice in September of 1970, once in May 1971, in August and again now.

Let me sum up where I think we stand, and I believe we have reached the end of these discussions.

We have made a major effort to come to a rapid agreement with you. We recognized that you have major problems and we have spent our time attempting to meet them. We believed that they could all be worked out if there were a real intention to reach agreement.

If we could have reached agreement on some general principles, you would have found us a willing partner in the search for peace which is the highest goal of this Administration and which, as you well know, I started as a private citizen.

Since May 31 we have done the following things:

—We have agreed to fix a date for American and allied withdrawals as part of a negotiated settlement.

In all our proposals, incidentally, we have followed the outline of your seven and nine points and drawn on the language of your formulations to the maximum extent possible in order to show our good will and serious intent.

—We have said that if the other aspects of a settlement are agreed, we would consider some adjustments in that timetable.

—We have agreed that the question of the armed forces of Indochina should be settled among the Indochinese parties themselves, as you proposed.

—With respect to prisoners of war we have changed our position that the release should be completed two months before completion of withdrawals and agreed to your proposal that release be completed at the same time as withdrawals.

—We have agreed that the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Agreements should be respected, that there should be no foreign intervention in the Indochinese countries, and that the Indochinese people be left to settle their own affairs, in effect your points 5 and 6.

—We have agreed that the problems of the Indochinese countries be settled on the basis of mutual respect for independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference, which is drawn verbatim from the first sentence of your point 6.

—We have agreed that South Vietnam should adopt a foreign policy of neutrality, based on Madame Binh's points 4B and 5.

—We have agreed that reunification should be left to North and South Vietnam, in effect, Madame Binh's point 4A.

—We have agreed that there should be a general ceasefire throughout Indochina as part of an overall settlement instead of an immediate

ceasefire before a settlement which we proposed on October 7. Of course, we continue to prefer an immediate ceasefire.

—On the political issues we have agreed to include political as well as military issues in a negotiated settlement.

—We have declared that the South Vietnamese should determine their own political future and that we would not attempt to shape it.

—We have agreed to make a series of declarations that would give force to that pledge and which we believe would have a major political impact on South Vietnamese political life.

—We have said that we would support no candidate, and would remain neutral in the South Vietnamese election.

—We have said that we would abide by the outcome of either these elections or any other political processes shaped by the South Vietnamese.

—We have said we would agree to a limitation on our military and economic assistance relationship with any government in South Vietnam.

—We have told you honestly that we are not experts on South Vietnamese politics and perhaps we don't understand them sufficiently. And we have asked for some counter formulation and we are prepared to listen to counter proposals from you. We have received nothing but vilification and untrue statements.

—Finally we have told you that upon signature of an agreement in principle, the President is prepared to recommend to Congress a \$7.5 billion aid program for all Indochina, of which \$2 to \$2.5 billion would be earmarked for North Vietnam.

These are not the actions of a government which does not want an agreement.

These are not the actions of a government that wants to trick or deceive you. If we want to waste time, we can do it at Kleber. You have proven you are able to do it there with the able assistance of our colleagues.

I do not believe that the issue of withdrawal would present an insurmountable problem.

There is only one issue and that is the political problem. We admit that it is extremely difficult. We are prepared to listen to any reasonable proposal.

So far you have asked us to impose one particular government on Vietnam and to overthrow the existing government. We have told you again and again and I'm telling you once more today we are prepared to discuss with you how to establish a political process which truly gives the South Vietnamese people a chance to express their views. And

we have said on innumerable occasions that we are willing to abide by the outcome of the political process.

The results of this summer in no respect have come up to our expectations. (Xuan Thuy asked Mr. Kissinger to repeat the last sentence which was then repeated.)

We have not discussed our negotiations here with any of your allies. But if you ask those of your allies who have negotiated with us they will describe us as having been meticulous and having attempted in good faith to carry out agreements we have made.

As I have told you on innumerable occasions, the President does not have to send his principal foreign policy adviser secretly twelve times to Paris in order to waste time.

He does not have to send me here in order to engage in petty maneuvers of trickery. Nor have you explained why I, as a private citizen and against the opposition of the entire government, launched negotiations for a bombing halt, nor why I now in the government should engage in maneuvers designed to thwart negotiations.

So the choice is up to you. If you have any concrete ideas of how to escape the deadlock which we have reached you can be sure we will examine them constructively and with the attitude of finding an acceptable solution.

Our strong preference is for negotiations and peace, the quicker the better. Whenever you choose this course we will be prepared to join you immediately and discuss with you seriously. But since this point has not yet been reached, I recommend we adjourn this channel until either of us has something new to say.

Xuan Thuy: Have you finished?

Dr. Kissinger: Yes.

Xuan Thuy: Let me say this. We have also told you many times no other people want peace more earnestly than the Vietnamese people. We have a long history of struggle against foreign aggression. We can say speaking of Vietnam as a whole that since World War II there has not been a day in Vietnam when the shooting has stopped.

Therefore what we desire the most is to have peace so that we can engage in peaceful reconstruction of our country. We want to live in friendship with all other peoples. What we want to see is countries with a higher level of science and technology help us with our peaceful reconstruction.

But to have peace we must have genuine independence and freedom.

The Vietnamese people cannot accept peace while still under the threat of bombing and shelling. The Vietnamese cannot accept peace without genuine independence and freedom.

The Vietnamese people are reasonable. We respect culture, we are courteous, and we always reciprocate at a higher level than those who deal with us.

As for those who only look to their own interests and have no respect for our interests, we are always ready to do the same.

The Paris Conference has lasted for three years. This proves my assertions. In negotiations we have proven good will and serious intent. We are patient and we persevere in getting peace. We want to settle the Vietnam problem by peaceful means and not by war.

But if at the Paris Conference trickery is used against us we always have a response. Similarly, on the battlefields we are also prepared to respond.

Mr. Special Advisor Kissinger says that you have crossed the ocean many times to come here. I have told you too that our government desires a peaceful settlement. That is why when the President of the United States downgraded the Paris Conference, I remained here.

I am entrusted with plenipotentiary power. I have the responsibility to reach peace through negotiations. Therefore, whenever you are prepared to have negotiations to reach peace, we are also prepared to do that. But when you are prepared to use other means, we are also prepared to take other means to cope with the situation.

The views you have expressed here today have not brought anything. You have only related things we know already and I don't want to comment on all the points now.

At the very beginning I told you that the crucial problems are the military and the political problems. If we can come to a reasonable settlement of these two problems, the other problems can be settled. These are the two problems which constitute the spinal cord, the spinal bone of the declaration of principles. We still have diverging views.

You have proposed a period for your troop withdrawal. This period does not suit us. We have explained how and why it does not suit us.

Regarding the Saigon Administration, you tried to explain time and again your position regarding this question. The more you explain this question, the more the actual situation belies your assertions. I really did not expect that after the election for the Lower House in South Vietnam and after the activities of Ambassador Bunker towards the candidates in South Vietnam, that Mr. Special Advisor Kissinger would still affirm that the United States wants fair elections in South Vietnam, that you want to abstain from influencing the results, and that you want the South Vietnamese people to freely express their views.

Therefore whatever you say, we have to look at the facts. The facts are that the United States wants to leave behind troops and is unwilling to totally withdraw them. When you make statements about the period

of troop withdrawal, about leaving behind advisers, and about limiting aid to North Vietnam, these statements clearly show your position.

My second conclusion is that the United States, one way or another, wants to maintain the Nguyen Van Thieu Administration in power in order to implement neocolonialism in South Vietnam.

As for us, we require the United States' withdrawal in totality in 1971—the totality of U.S. forces include ground, navy, and air forces, military and technical advisers, war material, military bases, without any reservation or exceptions.

As to the question of power in South Vietnam, we insist that if the United States strives to maintain the Nguyen Van Thieu Administration then no settlement can ensue.

So I agree with Mr. Special Advisor to adjourn this channel, since our views are still far diverging, until either party has something new. Then we should meet again.

In our view, the seven points of the Provisional Revolutionary Government and the nine points we have put forward here are reasonable and logical proposals. It is not true as you said that we repeat here what we say at Kleber Street. I propose you read again the minutes we have of our meeting here. Look at what I have told you and look at what I have said at Kleber Street. We always keep our word and we match our words with our deeds. We are prepared for a peaceful settlement with good will.

Dr. Kissinger: Are you finished?

Xuan Thuy: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: Let me just comment on a few things you have said so that we don't misunderstand each other.

First, I would like to express my high esteem for the Minister with whom I have now met twelve times. I respect the meticulousness and the toughness with which he has carried out his instructions.

If we nevertheless consider it a sign of disrespect to the President that no representative is sent from Hanoi, it is not out of disrespect but only due to the fact that we also have an envoy here with plenipotentiary powers.

Xuan Thuy: Could you repeat that?

Dr. Kissinger: We also have an Ambassador here who has every power to negotiate. There's no need to send the President's Special Advisor here.

I want to make absolutely clear my high personal esteem, and that of my government for the abilities of the Minister, which for our taste are sometimes too formidable.

It is simply hard to believe the desire of the government in Hanoi to settle rapidly if there is no representative of its political leadership here.

As for the other points which the Minister raised, I simply wish to keep the record clear.

Let me repeat, first, we believe that the issue of troop withdrawal is soluble and I believe that if the Minister put his negotiating skills to the matter we could resolve that problem if the other points were settled.

Second, regarding the limit on military aid to North Vietnam, the point we made was that we offer, without being asked, to limit our military aid to South Vietnam and we have said that this should be in proportion to the limits on military aid to North Vietnam.

Xuan Thuy: You act as if Vietnam were yours, as if North Vietnam belonged to you too. Vietnam belongs to the Vietnamese people.

Dr. Kissinger: You know we don't believe that. We have said a hundred times that we want the independence of Vietnam. There is no sense in going through the same exercise.

It takes a special form of logic to believe that the United States which is withdrawing from all over Asia, wants to keep forces in one particular corner of Asia.

Now regarding the maintenance of a particular government in South Vietnam, if you have any information about South Vietnam at all, then you will know that we did our best to try to arrange a fair electoral process for the South Vietnamese people at this time.

But I don't want to talk about the present election situation because now it is too late to do anything about it. I continue to believe that if we had understood each other earlier many things would have been possible.

I want to tell you again that it is up to you whether to believe me or not; that's your problem. If you want a settlement, I believe one is possible. We are not committed to maintaining any particular government in Vietnam. Your refusal to settle with us has the objective consequence that we have no other choice.

We are prepared, as I have said to you many times, to discuss with you what constitutes a free political process. We are not prepared to exclude any particular group, either those who support Thieu or those who support others. And if you had put your energies on this problem then you would have found us prepared to discuss it with you.

Ever since I first met the Minister over two years ago, I have proposed that we set a terminal date for ourselves and that we hold to it. If you want to ask your Soviet colleagues, you will find I gave them a precise schedule of how we would settle the Berlin question, and we beat that schedule by two weeks.

You have chosen to use this channel in a different way, to present us with a series of ultimatums instead of cooperative effort to resolve common problems. That is your choice.

Each side will now have to do what it must do. As far as we are concerned, we are prepared to make a serious effort to make peace with you whenever you are ready to make a serious effort with us.

Xuan Thuy: Have you finished?

I would like to make something clear about your interlocutor here and at Kleber Street.

Normally I would not have been at Kleber Street to lead the DRV delegation. The Provisional Revolutionary Government would not have appointed its Foreign Minister to these negotiations. This shows the importance we attach to the Paris Conference in a settlement of the Vietnam problem. But the party which has used the Paris Conference for other purposes is the United States.

Formally speaking, I should return to Hanoi; Mrs. Binh should return to her government; and we should appoint here a person at the same rank as Ambassador Porter.

Whenever a meeting is necessary with Mr. Special Advisor, then I and Mr. Le Duc Tho, together or alternately, could come here to meet you. So formally speaking, we have shown our respect to you.

Don't make the mistake of thinking you are important and we are not important. I think that the formal aspect is not crucial to the settlement of the problem. What is crucial is the substance of the problem, whether the U.S. is willing to settle the problem, whether we are willing to settle the problem.

I would not like to repeat once again the two questions concerning troop withdrawal and the Saigon Administration. We attach importance to these two points.

Dr. Kissinger: But you do not have any proposals? May I ask a question just so that I can tell the President exactly what you have in mind?

Xuan Thuy: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: Your point 3—I mean point 3 of your 9 point proposal and not Madame Binh's. You say that the U.S. should stop supporting Thieu and should make a secret agreement; you say a lot of other vague things. But you never say concretely what you want us to do.

You have said we should use the October 3 elections to bring this about. Our proposal was designed to have maximum impact on the election. In the conditions now existing that is now impossible.

We still believe the framework of our point 3 provides an opportunity to move in that direction of a free choice.

I have told you a hundred times that we are not supporting any particular government. You have never made a concrete operational

proposal. Maybe you have to the *New York Times*, and I do not know yet what you have said to Senator McGovern. But not to me.

So what concretely do you have in mind under existing conditions? What do you want us to say? How would you formulate point 3? Our point 3? Even if we accepted your point 3 it doesn't mean anything; it is just an abstract point.

Xuan Thuy: I think that what is important is the substance of the problem. As to the wording, an agreement to the wording is easy. As to the substance, we think that the United States now is unwilling to give up Nguyen Van Thieu. And without that, without giving up Nguyen Van Thieu, no settlement can be reached.⁷

Once Le Duc Tho proposed a concrete idea. I have advanced a concrete idea.

Dr. Kissinger: What was Le Duc Tho's concrete idea? The Special Advisor is so fertile with ideas, I do not remember which one it was.

Xuan Thuy: You can look again at the minutes of the meeting. As for myself I have suggested that Nguyen Van Thieu resign, but you consider this suggestion impossible and you want to act in your own way. And in such a way we feel you want to cover up your designs to maintain Nguyen Van Thieu.

Now the Nguyen Van Thieu Administration controls nearly a million man army equipped by the United States with American advisers. The Administration of Nguyen Van Thieu has a huge police force and a great number of pacification teams besides a heavy net of CIA agents in South Vietnam and over 200,000 United States troops in South Vietnam.

The United States is now helping Nguyen Van Thieu to transport his forces and launch operations here and there. The United States Embassy is doing everything to support Nguyen Van Thieu militarily and politically. (While Thuy's remarks were being translated, Mr. Kissinger interjected that this was "nonsense.") You cannot give up Nguyen Van Thieu.

Dr. Kissinger: For the hundredth and twentieth time I tell you the question is not whether to support or give up Thieu, but what process will shape the future of Vietnam after the settlement.

Mr. Minister, do you have anything else?

Xuan Thuy: You often state that you do not support any special candidate. What you want to find out is how to realize a political process in South Vietnam, a process that is democratic, free and so the people of South Vietnam can express their views.

⁷ The paragraph was highlighted.

That argument is known to us and world opinion, but you use it to cover up the substance of the problem, that is to say the United States wants to maintain Nguyen Van Thieu.

And the facts, the actual situation, have been demonstrated sufficiently to every Vietnamese, and to all peaceloving people of the world.

Dr. Kissinger: I suggest, Mr. Minister. . . . The only way we can deal together is on the basis of what we say. The President does not have to send his special advisor here secretly to play games.

When you are willing to discuss seriously on the basis of what we say then we can discuss with you. Until you have tested us, it does not make any sense to psychoanalyze what I say. You have not even tested us.

You know how to reach General Walters.

Xuan Thuy: I agree, but I should add one more thing. Since you refer to whom I receive or meet with in the press, I wish to say that this is something we normally do. Whoever asks to meet us we receive them. If they ask about the situation or if they ask about our position, we answer. With journalists, we answer them as we please. But it is another question back home whether they write what I have told them. I feel that very few faithfully reflect what I have told them.

Second, you suggest that we should approach our allies. How do we negotiate Vietnam . . . ?

Dr. Kissinger: Not about Vietnam, but on other matters. Just to see how we conduct our negotiations. We have not discussed Vietnam with your allies.

We always believe that when I am involved in negotiations we could go secretly, rapidly and get to the heart of the matter. But for that it is important that we behave with honesty.

I am talking about matters which concern them, not matters that concern you. My point was that you will find that no one has been tricked by us. We have kept every promise. We have been tough negotiators, but we have kept every promise.

No one knows I have made 8 points, or 7 points to you, and no one knows what you have said. And we will not now approach any of your allies to give them an account of what has happened.

I told you on many occasions we believe that the war must be settled with you. Though we are disappointed we cannot settle here with you, we will not go to others to settle it. Whatever discussions we have with other countries, including your allies, will not concern you.

The war will be settled either by negotiations with you or unilaterally, but not by the intervention of other countries. That is our attitude.

Xuan Thuy: I have clearly understood you now. I too have been saying that a peaceful settlement should be sought in Paris.

Dr. Kissinger: I agree.

Xuan Thuy: Le Duc Tho and I maintain this secret channel with you. No one knows that we have put forward our nine points or your seven points.

Dr. Kissinger: Nor does anyone from us.

Xuan Thuy: So we have come to that point. If there is nothing more to say, then I propose we adjourn.

Dr. Kissinger: I have nothing more to say. But I still hope to greet the Minister in the United States sometime. I have not invited any other Vietnamese, North or South, except the Special Advisor.

Xuan Thuy: Thank you, and on behalf of Mr. Le Duc Tho, thank you beforehand. And if that is our desire, we should make efforts to bring that day closer.

Dr. Kissinger: That is our intention.⁸

⁸ In a September 13 memorandum to Nixon, Kissinger described the discussion as “the shortest meeting on record.” Le Duc Tho did not attend, and they were at an impasse and agreed not to plan another meeting. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Box 1039, Files for the President, Vietnam Negotiations, HAK II 1971) Kissinger sent a copy of his memorandum to Rogers on September 14, but omitted the section on his opinion that Hanoi would not address the political impasse until after the South Vietnamese elections. (Ibid., Box 861, For the President’s Files, Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David Memos, July–Dec 71) Kissinger also sent a summary to Bunker in backchannel message WHS 1101 and asked him to brief Thieu. (Ibid., Box 872, For the President’s Files, Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Vietnam Elections)

255. Editorial Note

On September 14, 1971, a 2-day series of heated exchanges began between the White House and the Pentagon over apparent leaks to the press about withdrawals of U.S. troops from Vietnam made by General Creighton Abrams, the United States Commander in Vietnam. According to the transcript of a telephone conversation that took place at 6:55 p.m. between the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry Kissinger, and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, they had the following exchange:

“K: Mel, I was just talking to the President. We have been reading the *Star* story. We don’t know what to do about the Pentagon.

“L: That’s just a cheap story.

"K: Pentagon sources.

"L: Did you read my press conference about a week ago?

"K: No. Couldn't everybody just shut up!

"L: You can't get reporters to shut up.

"K: I don't mean the reporters. Who the hell is Abrams to say there will be no residual forces!?

"L: McGovern came out of the meeting with Abrams and said Vietnamization program eventually would provide for the total withdrawal . . .

"K: Now that we are in the end phase of it . . .

"L: I understand that completely, Henry. But no one is talking in the Pentagon. If you are going to take McGovern's . . .

"K: I don't give a damn about McGovern!

"L: They are absolutely cheap stories. What they are doing is quoting military sources but I guarantee there is no military—there might be some Army officers—some are getting to the point where they think Vietnam has hurt the Army.

"K: There will be no awards for getting out 2 months earlier if we get out in a way that the Communists are in power in Saigon. All this agony will have been in vain." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 11, Chronological File)

At 8:22 p.m., Kissinger spoke with Moorer to convey similar concern about Abrams' apparent leak. According to a transcript of their conversation, Moorer began, "I talked to Abrams. It was just exactly like I thought—he didn't talk about the withdrawals, the times, or anything like that. He simply told McGovern that his philosophical approach in working with the South Vietnamese is to go toward balanced structure that would eventually be for the good of their country." Kissinger stated that he would call President Richard Nixon and reassure him and added, "Tom, you are not our problem. I don't know where we would be without you." (Ibid.)

Kissinger placed a call to the President at 8:25, and they had the following exchange:

"K: I raised hell with Moorer and Laird. They are going to send out additional order to Abrams to keep his mouth shut.

"P: Do you think Abrams put out 'getting out by spring?'

"K: No, I think that was by McGovern but I think Abrams was protecting himself by saying there would not be a residual force.

"P: That's not his business! I think we have to consider withdrawing the son-of-a-bitch.

“K: I think so, Mr. President. He is a meritorious person but he is no longer on top of this. I think we might think of a younger man who wants a reputation. But it will look like the last days of the Johnson Administration if we withdraw him.

“P: Get someone second in command that will keep him from drinking too much and talking too much.

“K: We can’t get anyone that will keep him from drinking too much, but we can get someone to keep him from talking too much.

“P: They go together! Do you have Laird silenced?

“K: I called Laird. He said he would hold a meeting tomorrow and get pretty tough.” (Ibid.)

After Laird held a meeting on September 15, he spoke with Kissinger at 8:40 a.m. and had the following conversation:

“L: We’ve just been having a little meeting on this matter of Abrams’ interview and God dammit Henry, last night you got in touch with Tom Moorer and didn’t wait till the McGovern thing was in. If you’re going to get screwed up about what McGovern says goes on then I’m going to see the President. God dammit, I resent it.

“K: It wasn’t just the Abrams thing . . .

“L: Well, then I think I better talk to the President today.

“K: That’s up to you. What we said to Moorer was that no one should talk about troop withdrawals.

“L: No one does, but to jump Abrams on this thing . . .

“K: No one was jumping Abrams; we just said that there should be no statements by anyone.

“L: I’ll handle that. There will be no statements; we’ve shut them off over here. I just don’t want Abrams jumped on something McGovern says. I want to know when these things are going on.

“K: I assume that Moorer is in touch with you.

“L: Well he is. But I’ll defend Abrams any day in the week.

“K: It’s just that every time a troop withdrawal announcement is imminent, there are stories close enough to the truth to indicate that someone is leaking.

“L: Well, Abe has had to put up with more than any field commander ever has.

“K: That is true.” (Ibid.)

256. Conversation Among President Nixon, his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and his Chief of Staff (Haldeman)¹

Washington, September 17, 1971.

Kissinger: We're going to go on Monday,² Mr. President, with a—
Nixon: Good.

Kissinger: —maximum effort, everything that flies in a stretch of 20 miles north of the DMZ—

Nixon: Good. They've been asking for it.

Kissinger: And—

Nixon: Because they're building up, and they've been violating the thing. Don't you think it's the right thing to do—?

Kissinger: Oh, yes. Oh, I—you know the domestic heat we're going to take. But we're—the way we're going to do it, you know, you can judge it better than I can. I think the way we're going to do it—see, if we hit Monday—what is Monday morning there, that's Sunday night here—by the time it's Monday morning here, we will already have announced that the raid is over, and there'll be no other. We'll just say, "This completes—this is protective action, and violation of the understandings. They've built a road across the DMZ; they've been shooting at our planes."

Nixon: "And endangering—and endangering our forces as we withdraw."

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: I'd put that point in, rather than protective—"Endangering our forces as we were withdrawing."

Kissinger: So, we'll have a—

Nixon: I don't think anybody's going to complain about that.

Haldeman: They're going to know you did. Really, they [unclear]—

Kissinger: Well, 400 airplanes [unclear]—

Haldeman: Okay, but they get confused, Henry. But—

Nixon: Yeah.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 575–7. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. The exchange is part of a larger conversation, 5:37–6:24 p.m.

² September 20.

Haldeman: —the people—the paper—the press will know it, but when they write it, it still comes out as—they think we're bombing all the time there, anyway.

Kissinger: So it's—

Nixon: But you see, Henry, from the standpoint of our diplomatic move—

Kissinger: It's essential.

Nixon: —it's indispensable.

Kissinger: It is essential, because—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —it's—in terms of what you said to the Romanian this morning,³ which I thought was superb, incidentally.

Nixon: Well, Henry—

Kissinger: Right?

Nixon: —did he get the message?

Kissinger: Well, if he—

Nixon: [unclear]—

Kissinger: —didn't get the message he ought to be fired.

Nixon: Huh?

Kissinger: You said—and you said it in this nice, quiet way. You said, "I just want you to know my patience with these people is wearing thin." And—that they—you—

Nixon: And I says, "I don't want you to be surprised by anything that happens." I said, "You—you know what I mean." I mean, after all—I says, "I—"

Kissinger: Now, with this thing happening—

Nixon: [unclear] we did in Cambodia, and Laos, and China, and so forth. I said, "I—I'm just not gonna—I mean, they have—we've been forthcoming, and they haven't." And I said, "My patience is coming to end." I said, "They just mustn't press me too far."

Kissinger: That's right.

Haldeman: [laughs]

Nixon: [unclear]—

Kissinger: Well, they've played into our hands in one respect. Yesterday, Xuan Thuy tied the overthrow of Thieu again—⁴

³ Nixon and Kissinger met with Ambassador Bogdan in the Oval Office that morning. See *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XXIX, Eastern Europe; Eastern Mediterranean, 1969–1972, Document 207.

⁴ See "N. Vietnam Toughens Its Peace Terms," *The Washington Post*, September 17, 1971, p. A1.

Nixon: To POWs, even.

Kissinger: To POWs.

Nixon: That was good. That was good.

Kissinger: So, they're going through a tough phase now, for a few weeks. So this—

Nixon: Well, I feel that—I kind of feel in a way, that with the vote on the draft today, which I just as—of course, I mean, we were all pleased with: 47 to 36.⁵

Kissinger: Yeah, but it was another example where everyone of—told you, or told me at least—I don't know what they told you—

Nixon: Oh, we were behind seven votes.

Kissinger: —that it was lost. It was like the Mansfield thing, and when—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: —you stepped in there—

Haldeman: They didn't tell us that; they told us it was 45 to 45.

Nixon: No. No. Seven votes behind, Bob, is one thing.

[Omitted here is a discussion of the vote on the military draft extension bill.]

Nixon: Incidentally, I hope that you got that, and I wanted to get Bunker's assessment, now, on the situation. If he—

Kissinger: It's due tomorrow.

Nixon: If he, certainly—

Kissinger: I've written—

Nixon: Also, Bunker—Bunker's got—you and—or Haig, apparently, got that when you were out—

Kissinger: I got it out within a half an hour of—

Nixon: And you tell him: "This is it." You—

Kissinger: Well, when we put it out—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: —we said, "This is—" Well, we said, "This is not simply for your information, as a press conference. This is now a directive. And all of you people are expected to follow this as a directive and not just as a general statement of Presidential concern."

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: And—

Nixon: Good.

⁵ See "Draft Bill Survives In Senate: Nixon Wins 47–36 Victory; Filibuster Set," *The Washington Post*, September 18, 1971, p. A1.

Kissinger: Of course—

Nixon: Well, we got out some of the other things, too, in that thing—

Kissinger: Oh, yeah.

Nixon: —and that's with just Vietnam. I think a lot of things that were said in *Foreign Policy* needed to be—

Kissinger: Actually, this AP-UP meeting this morning is very critical—

Nixon: Great. Good.

Kissinger: Bill Hearst, unfortunately, is coming out with an editorial on Sunday blasting Thieu. He talked to Ky's man. Is it worth my while talking to him—?

Nixon: Yes.

Kissinger: —when I'm in—

Nixon: Yes.

Kissinger: —on the West Coast next week?

Nixon: Hearst—No, no. Not if it comes out first.

Haldeman: It's too late.

Nixon: Call him now—

Kissinger: Well, it's too late—well—

Nixon: Is his editorial already printed?

Kissinger: His editorial is printed, but I can keep him from following it up.

Nixon: Well, I didn't know that the West Coast man will do any good, Henry.

Kissinger: Well, Bill Hearst, himself.

Nixon: Is he out there?

Kissinger: Somebody told me he was out there.

Nixon: [unclear] the summer.

Kissinger: Otherwise, I can see him in New York when I go up to meet with Howard Stein's group.

Nixon: Goddammit, I'd call him on the phone.

Kissinger: I'll call him.⁶

⁶ Kissinger spoke with William Randolph Hearst, Jr., Editor-in-Chief, Hearst Newspaper Chain, on the telephone at 6:40 p.m. and complained that "you of course heard only one side of the story." Hearst replied, "I know that Ky(?) is a representative of [omission in the original] but then Ky and I are close personal friends." Kissinger requested a meeting with Hearst, who replied, "Tell the President that if I have done him an injustice I will go." Kissinger ended the conversation by saying, "We are so close—we know where your heart is and I will call you Monday." No record of further discussion between the two men has been found. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 11, Chronological File)

Nixon: I'd call him today and say that I want you to meet him, and that we understand his position on the whole thing. "But now look here, you've been our staunchest supporter, and will you withhold—will you please hear our case?"

Kissinger: You know, Jackson was stunned by what you said yesterday;⁷ he thought it was aimed at him.

Haldeman: It was.

Nixon: Jackson did?

Kissinger: Yeah, and he said that he's releasing a letter—⁸

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: —he's releasing a letter he wrote to you, which is, in effect, saying the same thing.

Nixon: That it's [unclear]? Well, what do you mean?

Kissinger: Well, he's releasing a letter saying how you should fix the election: that get another—he said he would never have wanted to suggest overthrowing Thieu.

Nixon: He—oh, he denies that, huh?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Haldeman: Well, you didn't aim that at him. But, you said that he said, specifically, you should withdraw—withhold foreign aid.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Haldeman: If they don't—

Kissinger: Oh, yeah.

Haldeman: —hold free elections, and you said [unclear]—

Kissinger: Well, he didn't quite say it. He said he wants to reserve it—

Nixon: Nevertheless, at least it got him to respond.

Kissinger: Oh, yeah.

Nixon: I think they're all on a—

⁷ At his September 16 press conference, Nixon said a propos of Senator Jackson's recommendation that the United States consider withholding aid to South Vietnam if the upcoming Presidential election was not contested:

"If what the Senator is suggesting is that the United States should use its leverage now to overthrow Thieu, I would remind all concerned that the way we got into Vietnam was through overthrowing Diem and the complicity in the murder of Diem; and the way to get out of Vietnam, in my opinion, is not to overthrow Thieu with the inevitable consequence or the greatly increased danger, in my opinion, of that being followed by coup after coup and the dreary road to a Communist takeover." (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1971*, p. 953) See also "Jackson Wars on Aid to Saigon: Senator Says He May Shift Stand Unless Nixon Gains a 'Genuine' Election," *The New York Times*, September 11, 1971, p. 1.

⁸ Not found.

Kissinger: And that's one of the great advantages—great advantages, Mr. President. If they are responding to you, that's a hell of a lot better than if we are running around defending ourselves against their nitpicking.

Haldeman: That's really kind of the difference we're in now. We're on the offensive, and they're, they're having to swing back, instead of the other way.

Kissinger: McGovern looks like a horse's ass now.

Haldeman. Yes, he does.

Nixon: How?

Kissinger: Well, he says they're softening their terms the same week that they're hardening it. He says you can get—when I explained to these AP and UP guys this morning the—what, what they mean by a cease-fire when they offered it, they said, "Well, how can McGovern do this?" I said, "Well, I know him. He's a very honest, very honorable man. He just didn't study this thing. We live with it day after day. He doesn't know the strict terminology they use."

Nixon: Cease-fire, yeah.

[Omitted here is discussion of George McGovern, the media, and the Pentagon Papers.]

Nixon: But, getting back to Johnson, don't you think he's just terribly—must be terribly frustrated, the poor son-of-a-bitch? You know, you think of this miserable war—and, first of all, Henry, it isn't a miserable war. The goddamn war was fought for a great cause and a good cause—

Haldeman: But it's been made—

Nixon: —and we didn't have to get into it, to begin with. We shouldn't have started down the Diem trail. We shouldn't have made the Laotian deal, in my opinion. All right, that's all second-guessing. But once in it, this war could have been ended in a year or two years—

Kissinger: Mr. President—

Nixon: Using our air power we could have knocked those bastards right off the lot—

Kissinger: —if you, if you had been in office—if we had done Cambodia in '66—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: If we had done Cambodia in '66, and Laos in '67, the war would be history.

Nixon: And with a victory.

Kissinger: And with a—they couldn't have taken that, plus the bombing. Impossible.

Haldeman: We wouldn't have had to do it if we had done the bombing right, early enough—

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: And [unclear]

Kissinger: And we might not have had to do the bombing if you had done Cambodia and Laos. So—

Nixon: Now, Moorer—evidently, Laird is clued in on this thing, isn't he?

Kissinger: On the—Monday? Yeah.

Nixon: Yeah. All right.

Kissinger: We did it through Laird.

Nixon: Fine. And he knows that, that there were a variety of reasons [unclear]. Good. Good. Okay. Do we—

Kissinger: Well, you—

Nixon: —tell Rogers, or not?

Kissinger: No.

Nixon: And he shouldn't. Probably not.

Kissinger: He's up in New York.

Nixon: Probably not, it's just as well to just let it—

Kissinger: To let it—

Nixon: And when it comes, just say, "Well, it's a routine matter." I just—I wouldn't play the whole thing.

Kissinger: Or, I could call him tomorrow and say that—

Nixon: I'd just say, "Look, you ought to know that we had this—

Kissinger: The President has author—

Nixon: "—we had this enormous buildup in the DMZ, and it threatened our forces, and because, and so forth. So, we thought—the President just authorized this one—"

Kissinger: One—

Nixon: "—two-hour strike to take out the stuff so that we aren't going to have some casualties." I'd put it on that deal.

Kissinger: Right. Right.

Nixon: Would you do that?

Kissinger: I'll do it tomorrow—

Nixon: And then, we could—and we're not going to comment. We're going to throw all the comment over to Defense—

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: —and we're not going to say anything. It's just the one—the few hours.

Kissinger: I'll do it.

Nixon: But I want him to know.

Kissinger: Right. I think it's better.

Nixon: Yeah, then we—but, you see, Henry, in terms of your diplomatic game, coming back to [unclear]—

Kissinger: We must have it. If we're going to—

Nixon: —I feel that, I feel that—now, the little Romanian gnome, he'll wire that tonight, won't he?

Kissinger: Oh, yeah. That's back already.

Nixon: And then, what you told him—you left that hanging over the son-of-a-bitch, didn't you? You had—

Kissinger: Oh, and I warned them. Our records show I warned them at every meeting, "Stop this build-up of—north of the DMZ." They've been firing from north of the DMZ.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: And we're getting a poop sheet together in case if the public—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: —reaction gets bigger than we think it will.

Nixon: Good.

Kissinger: To get it around. And, uh—

Haldeman: Can you hang that on violation of the DMZ?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Sure.

Kissinger: Oh, yeah.

Nixon: It's a violation of the understanding, a clear violation of the understanding.⁹ But tomorrow's thing, I—rather than a technical thing—I never get into that.

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: I'd simply say, "They had a build-up in—"

Haldeman: [unclear]

Nixon: "—violation of the understanding, which endangered our American forces that are withdrawing. It would have increased our casualties, and we've taken it out." Yeah, boy, and then let it fly—

Haldeman: And you've said all along if, you know, we're—

Nixon: Sure.

Haldeman: —pulling out [unclear]

Kissinger: No, in terms of the diplomatic game that we are proposing it's essential—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

⁹ See footnote 3, Document 131.

Kissinger: It's highly important because it enables the Russians to say things could get worse. Incidentally, I'm giving you two memos for this weekend: one a fairly lengthy one that lays out the whole scenario, all the choices—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —including unilateral—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —the prisoners for—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —and where I think we are. And then, a briefer one for the NSC.

Nixon: Good.

Kissinger: The basic—I think, actually, Mr. President—

Nixon: I think we've decided it, though, Henry.

Kissinger: The NSC meeting ought to be very brief.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: I think we—

Nixon: Should we tell them?

Kissinger: —just get a little briefing—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —from—

Haldeman: [unclear]

Kissinger: —from Helms.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: Maybe get Moorer to do a little one on the military situation.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: And then, I think the less discussion—if you just could stress that we need to—whatever we do, Thieu has to be, now, preserved.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: And that the—that the speculation about withdrawal strategy must end.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

[Omitted here is discussion of preparing for the NSC meeting.]

Kissinger: But, for example, you know very well, Mr. President, if they could launch a big offensive, now—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —they'd have us on the ropes. And the fact that they are not launching a big offensive shows that they just haven't got it. Laos used up this year's supplies, one way or the other, because they expended them or because they were destroyed. But, one way or the

other, they couldn't launch an attack even in I Corps. Every other year they've had an attack in the Highlands in the summer. This year we figured, with elections coming up, they'd certainly have an attack.

Nixon: And they didn't.

Kissinger: And they haven't had any significant—even—

Nixon: Well, now the argument that could be made that they didn't do that is because they were having talks with you, you know.

Kissinger: But no one thinks they have the forces there.

Nixon: No, I'm just suggesting that.

Kissinger: Yeah. You could say that. That's true, you could say that.

Nixon: That's possible, because we have been restrained.

Kissinger: You could say that.

Nixon: I don't agree. I—but you don't think that's the reason?

Kissinger: I don't think so. Because—

Haldeman: Can they still attack now?

Kissinger: Because their usual tactic is—

Nixon: Sure.

Kissinger: But they—

Nixon: [unclear] but, so they don't.

Kissinger: Well, but their usual tactic is not to do that. Their usual tactic is to hit you while they're talking.

Nixon: That's correct. And so is ours.

Kissinger: Although, I did warn them that if there were attacks—

Nixon: Well, all right. We're going to do this for—incidentally, this has to be done anyway.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Because, looking down the road, I think it is dangerous to have this buildup. Do you not agree?

Kissinger: Oh, yes. Well, Abrams urged it on me when I was there in June. He was pleading for it then.

Nixon: Well, here we've given it to him. And, incidentally, won't there be a bigger target now?

Kissinger: Oh, they'll—that—that's a big one. Oh, yeah.

Nixon: There's plenty of stuff in there to hit.

Kissinger: Oh, well, he wants to hit it for five days. But that we can't. That—

Nixon: Is there enough to hit—?

Kissinger: Oh, there's more than enough. I—there's five days worth of attacks in there. He wanted 5 to 10 days, but that would create too much of a furor, don't you think—?

Nixon: No, no, no. We're just resuming the bombing in the North.

257. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, September 18, 1971.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

Recent events force us to take a dispassionate look at where we are on Vietnam, the likely prospects, and the policy options as we head into the terminal phase of our involvement.

The underlying assumption remains what it has been from the outset of your Administration: the manner in which we end the war, or at least our participation, is crucial both for America's global position and for the fabric of our society.

A swift collapse in South Vietnam traced to precipitate American withdrawal would seriously endanger your effort to shape a new foreign policy role for this country. The impact on friends, adversaries and our own people would be likely to swing us from post World War II predominance to post Vietnam abdication, instead of striking the balanced posture of the Nixon Doctrine.

At home, the need to close the conflict with dignity is perhaps even more compelling. An ignominious rout in Vietnam would leave deep scars on our society, calling into question the heavy sacrifices and fueling the impulses for recrimination. The already rampant crisis of authority would deepen. For the future of our own people, then, as well as for international reasons, it is essential that we leave Vietnam as an act of governmental policy and with dignity, not as a response to pressures and in the form of a collapse.

Where We Are—The Wasting Assets.

We have consistently followed the two strands of Vietnamization and negotiations since the outset of your Administration. You may remember our concerns in 1969 over the ultimate outcome of Vietnamization. We recognized from the beginning the uncertainty that the South Vietnamese could be sufficiently strengthened to stand on their own within the time span that domestic opposition to American involvement would allow. It has always been recognized that a delicate point would be reached where our withdrawals would coincide with

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 872, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Encore Sept. 71–15 Feb. 72, President's Speech January 25, 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

maximum domestic uncertainty to jeopardize the whole structure at the final hour.

Therefore a negotiated settlement has always been far preferable. Rather than run the risk of South Vietnam crumbling around our remaining forces, a peace settlement would end the war with an act of policy and leave the future of South Vietnam to the historical process. There would be a clear terminal date rather than a gradual winding down. We could heal the wounds in this country as our men left peace behind on the battlefield and a healthy interval for South Vietnam's fate to unfold. In short, Vietnamization may be our ultimate recourse; it cannot be our preferred choice.

To date we have navigated our precarious course quite well, balancing off the demands of the negotiating process, stability in South Vietnam and our domestic scene. But our negotiating assets are wasting.

Vietnamization has worked two pressures on Hanoi to negotiate a settlement, while buying time at home with the steady decline of U.S. forces, casualties, and expenses. First, it told the North Vietnamese that they had to pay a price to get us out of the South quickly and totally. Second, it painted the prospect of the South Vietnamese government growing stronger and perhaps able to make it on its own.

Our first asset has all but withered away. Domestic pressures, coupled with the indiscipline of the bureaucracy, assures the North Vietnamese—almost daily, in a nearly compulsive manner—that we will be completely out of Vietnam soon. Why should they pay for what will fall into their laps in any event?

Until these past few weeks our second asset was still giving Hanoi serious pause. The Thieu Administration has maintained a remarkable degree of stability. The irony of the situation is that this stability should be threatened now for reasons extrinsic to the situation. If it were not for the accident of the four-year Presidential term that we helped to write into the Constitution, this asset would almost certainly remain potent. An election last year, or next year, indeed anytime other than at the climax of Vietnamization, would have compounded the enemy's problems and probably tipped their calculations toward a negotiated solution.

But the election now, on top of major withdrawals, our China initiative, our domestic dissidence and speculative bureaucracy, threatens to be too much for the GVN. And Hanoi has probably adjusted its tactics accordingly.

Our Paris experience this summer illustrates this. In June and July we were very close to a settlement. There was a confluence of motives. Hanoi, judging Thieu might be stronger a year from now, thought they might jolt him by making an agreement that included our fixed withdrawals and various political declarations on neutrality and limitations

on our aid. We, in turn, wanted a solution to put a terminal date on the war and to end the divisions in our country. This might have resulted in an agreement in principle signed by Hanoi to affect the elections. They would then have strung out the process of turning it into a final settlement, and then reviewed the bidding after October 3.

Instead, Minh and Ky began positioning themselves for our departure and possible accommodations. Thieu made some serious miscalculations, and we are left with an uncontested election that will severely diminish rather than strengthen Thieu's credentials in this country. The carping here, in turn, plays back into South Vietnam, feeding speculation and unease.

This enables Hanoi to hope that Thieu will fall without a negotiated settlement. As foreshadowed on August 16 and confirmed on September 13, the other side now has every incentive to wait for the interreacting combination of unrest in South Vietnam and an American domestic squeeze to topple him and pave the way for their eventual control. They probably now judge that a negotiated settlement could arrest this process and serve as a *deus ex machina* both for Thieu and for us. Their self-confidence was reflected in their almost insolent manner at our last session, where they made no pretense of accommodation and didn't even bother to build a negotiating record.

Trends.

The situation is unmistakably complex.

In South Vietnam, the currents of political unrest are beginning to flow as various forces sense the American mood and anticipate our actions. Some in the Thieu Administration and the army are beginning to hedge their bets and, in certain instances, are attempting to sound out American officials. Some of the non-communist opposition are bur-nishing their credentials for compromise with the Viet Cong. And the communists are stirring the waters with terrorist acts in Saigon and other cities. This process is accelerated by U.S. public and governmental debate concerning our future moves which incites the South Vietnamese to jockey for position in the post-American period.

In North Vietnam, as already explained, there is thus little pressure for negotiations. The more we seem to disapprove of Thieu, the more we will unilaterally run down our one remaining negotiating asset, and the less Hanoi needs a settlement to overturn him.

In the United States, the momentum for rapid disengagement is rising, and we now face the real danger of Congressional legislation setting a date for our withdrawals and perhaps limiting our assistance to South Vietnam. The clamor will rise for a straight deal of fixed withdrawals for release of prisoners. A dwindling number of opponents are still motivated by the possibility that we do not mean to terminate our

involvement. The politically and morally wrenching fact is, however, that much of the opposition is motivated by other considerations. The more they are convinced we are getting out, the more they are trying to impose restrictive conditions on our exit so as to claim credit for what they know we will do anyway. By definition, it is almost impossible to stay ahead of the power curve of this type of opposition.

Against this background, speculation is fast building for your mid-November troop withdrawal announcement. There is real and feigned expectation that this will be climactic, probably a revelation of our final withdrawals except for a residual force to get back our prisoners. Such expectation has been fanned both by loose talk in the government agencies and by the press and opponents who are playing their usual game of projecting goals that you are bound to fall short of. We will be in the position that even a maximum program will appear anticlimactic and something less will provoke strong opposition. And should a total withdrawal be announced we will then be in a passive posture while Hanoi and our domestic opposition slowly slice the salami.

Immediate Actions Needed

Whatever basic policy course we pursue, we should move promptly on two of the above problems.

First, we must stop all American actions that are designed to, or have the effect of undermining Thieu.² He is just about the only negotiating lever we have left and for us to use him we must help him stay viable. Furthermore, he continues to represent the greatest stability to pursue the course of Vietnamization. Your powerful words at your press conference³ were a much needed tonic and have been disseminated here and abroad as the firm U.S. attitude. We had already sent instructions to Bunker to keep his Mission in line,⁴ some of whom have been dealing too freely with dissident forces. This week I passed reassurances to Saigon through the Vietnamese Ambassador here. And a strong presentation by you at the September 20 NSC meeting should help further to rein in the bureaucracy.

² Nixon underlined this sentence and wrote, "High priority," in the left margin.

³ At his September 16 press conference, Nixon said, "We would have preferred to have had a contested election in South Vietnam. We, however, cannot get people to run when they do not want to run." Nixon praised the GVN's democratization, noting, "We would prefer, as far as South Vietnam is concerned, that its democratic processes would grow faster. We believe that considerable headway has been made." (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1971*, pp. 952–953) See also footnote 7, Document 256.

⁴ Not further identified.

Second, we must tactically outflank your opponents on your November withdrawal speech. We must try to shut off comments by Administration officials. This, too, you should hit hard at the NSC session. Whatever we do, however, cannot prevent cresting public speculation which you cannot possibly match in your announcement. This means that you should deliver your statement well before November 15 and make its contents a surprise. You could announce the withdrawal of 40,000 more troops by February 1, 1972, no more sending of draftees to Vietnam, the end of an American ground combat role, and the promise of another announcement in January.

This would have the following virtues:

—A longer withdrawal projection would inevitably prove anticlimactic at home and all but erase what is already a shriveled bargaining asset with Hanoi.

—Its unexpected nature would force your opponents to reassess their line of attack. They would have to calculate that some private diplomatic moves were underway in the interval, especially after my second trip to Peking and the prospect of your two summits.

—It will gain some more months to make one more effort at negotiations and, in event of failure, to use your negotiating record to position the final American withdrawals.

Basic Policy Options

I see essentially four policy options, none without significant risks.

1. *Fixed Withdrawals for Prisoners.* We would lower our negotiating sights and break out points one and two of our eight points fixing a date for our withdrawals in exchange for prisoner release and a cease-fire with our forces.

This has surface appeal. We could probably negotiate such a deal and thus get our prisoners back soon and our forces out safely. We would, in any event, smoke out Hanoi's asking price in a very brief period. This course would seem to pull the teeth of domestic opposition.

However, we can expect Hanoi to demand an almost impossibly brief deadline for our troops,⁵ cessation of air support throughout Indochina, the removal of at least some American equipment, and restrictions on our assistance. They are likely to make political demands also, as foreshadowed by Xuan Thuy's statement in the September 16 plenary meeting⁶ that release of our prisoners is linked to Thieu's re-

⁵ Nixon underlined the last half of this phrase.

⁶ Nixon underlined the sentence to this point and drew a line to the left of the paragraph highlighting it up through this sentence. In the left margin he wrote, "The heart of the problem."

removal as well as our withdrawals. Thus, whatever package we put together would probably weaken the GVN fatally. North Vietnamese supplies and personnel could pour down the Trail, unhindered by either military action or a negotiated settlement. South Vietnam would probably topple within months, if not immediately under the impact of the settlement itself. The unravelling could well occur while some of our forces were still in country. Without American air power Laos and Cambodia could be expected to fall as well.

In short, this option remains decisively unattractive.

2. *Play Out Vietnamization.* We would seek to end our involvement in Vietnam through our unilateral policy. You could announce reductions in our presence down to a residual force which we would hold, along with our air support, to bargain for the prisoners. We would continue heavy bombing in the Panhandle at least through the next dry season (spring) and provide necessary economic and military assistance to the GVN. We would reveal our extensive negotiating record and portray this course as our only realistic alternative, given the other side's rejection of every reasonable negotiating proposal.⁷

This option would provide maximum support for the GVN, have the least destabilizing effect in South Vietnam, and leave it in the strongest position to continue the conflict at present or expected levels. It would mean also continued assistance for Laos and Cambodia. It would retain what is left of our fading assets for negotiations.

The probably fatal flaw is our domestic front. Pressures are already mounting for restrictive legislation on our troops and our aid. The debate in this country would zero in on Thieu as the sole obstacle to a settlement, and we could probably not sustain our position given the uncontested election in South Vietnam. Our prisoners might become stakes in a bigger game with the other side's demanding political concessions, whereas now there is a chance for a straight prisoners-withdrawal deal.

Thus, in order for this option to be effective we must greatly shore up our domestic front. Only clear signs of a private negotiating effort and, if it fails, an even more impressive negotiating record than we now have, would have a chance to stave off Congressional pressures and permit this course of action to succeed. The holding up of our domestic front in turn would increase the chances for negotiations.

⁷ Haldeman wrote in his August 24 diary entry that Nixon and Kissinger had discussed this option: "Henry was in, discussing the problem of the Vietnam election again, which does pose a serious problem. The P[resident] is strongly toying with releasing the fact of the secret negotiations, blowing the channel, and forcing them to deal with us publicly, and then attacking the Senate opponents, saying they forced us to abandon the secret negotiations, and so on." (*The Haldeman Diaries*, p. 349)

3. *Escalation.* We would slow our withdrawals, resume bombing of the North, and give Thieu maximum support.

After twenty-five years of struggle Hanoi is war-weary too and some severe jolts might produce a negotiating breakthrough. For our domestic and world audiences we would reveal our negotiating efforts and say we were left little choice.

We could never sustain this policy here at home. The public and Congressional outcry would be deafening, and governmental discipline would break down. Your Peking and Moscow summits would almost certainly be sunk, and with them probably the fruits of various outstanding negotiations.⁸

In brief, while I include this course as a theoretical option, I think its costs and risks are too heavy to consider it further.

4. *Another Major Negotiating Effort.* We would make one last major attempt to construct a negotiated settlement, either to end the war or to brighten the prospects for ending our involvement under option 2.

Attached at Tab C is the eight points we presented to the North Vietnamese on August 16 as an agreed statement of principles for a settlement.⁹ This document reflected all the progress we had made and attempted to bridge the positions of the two sides. As you know, all questions have been essentially settled except the political one (point three) and some manageable haggling over our withdrawals (point one). Thus we have basic agreement on prisoner release, an Indochina ceasefire, respect for the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Accords, international supervision and international guarantees.

On the political question, Hanoi's insistence that we remove Thieu remains the issue. On withdrawals, the contingency nature of our deadline (it is keyed to signature of a final agreement), its remoteness (nine months after the final agreement), and our residual forces (we have said this would be less than 10,000) are the problems for Hanoi.

We could in good conscience modify points one and three to meet the other side part way, along the lines of the revised eight points at Tab B.¹⁰ On withdrawals, we would shorten our deadline to seven months and key it to signature of the agreement in principle. This would sweeten the package of principles considerably for Hanoi and give them incentive to sign so as to activate our final pullouts. From our point of view such a schedule would not be markedly faster than

⁸ Nixon wrote, "No," to the left of this paragraph.

⁹ Attached but not printed; see Document 245.

¹⁰ Not attached.

what we would do anyway on a unilateral basis. It would get us down to a residual presence of ten thousand by July or August 1972, assuming we reached an agreement in principle by this December.

On the political side, in addition to the declarations we have already said we would make, we would provide for new Presidential elections in South Vietnam five months after a final negotiated settlement. The elections would be organized and run by an independent electoral commission representing all political forces and would have international supervision as well. One month before they took place, Thieu would resign, at which time we would begin withdrawing our residual forces. We would insist that Thieu, as well as any other South Vietnamese, could be a candidate.

You will note that this political proposal grows out of your August suggestion, which Bunker relayed to Thieu, that Thieu offer to step down after a peace settlement.¹¹ He made such an offer, somewhat vaguely, in his subsequent speech.

This scenario has attraction for the other side, despite their distrust of elections. Thieu would be stepping down, albeit temporarily; an independent body (which they could call a coalition) would run the election; and all political forces could participate. Our residual forces would begin leaving before the election. Hanoi might calculate that these factors plus the rest of the eight points would yield them their political prize.

There would indeed be severe risks, but the other side would have to deal with the GVN in putting together a final settlement including the election machinery; Thieu would be in charge until four months after a final settlement; and he would be eligible for reelection. We could thus live with such a settlement.

If a deal were not possible the very effort provides us the best way to get into a unilateral phased withdrawal. The other side's presumed weeks of deliberations would buy us time with evidence of private diplomacy, and then their turndown would bolster our already impressive negotiating record.

*I believe we should choose this option and move immediately to implement it.*¹²

We cannot afford a substantial period during which there are no active visible negotiations or ones we can point to later. Thus, with the special channel now suspended, we must move promptly with any new

¹¹ See Document 251.

¹² In *Ending the Vietnam War*, Kissinger summarized option 4 and noted that Nixon accepted it on September 20 (pp. 227–228).

initiative. We will want to launch it soon enough so that if domestic pressures culminate in restrictive legislation, we can put the opposition on the defensive for having thwarted our search for a settlement.

A Game Plan.

The first step is to secure Thieu's concurrence. General Haig could outline the substance of the revised eight points to him during his visit to Saigon next week. Against the background of the domestic situation in this country, its implications for American assistance, and the unattractiveness of our other options, I believe Thieu can be persuaded to agree to this negotiating effort. Ambassador Bunker assured us that Thieu could accept the eight points we tabled in August. He would probably calculate that Hanoi would turn down our new package; he would therefore have demonstrated his reasonableness and helped to bolster our domestic situation. If the other side did agree to a settlement in principle, as noted above, they would have to deal with him in working out a final agreement, he would remain in office until four months after peace was achieved, and he could be a candidate for reelection.

Assuming Thieu accepts our proposal, we face the choice of *how to float it to the other side*. We can (1) present it directly to the North Vietnamese; (2) pass it to them through an intermediary country; or (3) try to get an intermediary country directly engaged.

The first course has the advantages of dealing in a well-established and familiar framework and not putting into play Hanoi's complexes about its autonomy which could complicate our task. However, to go back with a fresh proposal after having just sharply broken the channel would be a confession of weakness. The other side would judge we were panicking, gobble up our new concessions, resort to their usual tactic of unacceptable counter proposals, and wait to see what might happen either in South Vietnam or in Paris. We would simply run out of time at home. Furthermore, if they did make a settlement, they would be even more likely to violate it if none of their friends were involved in helping to broker it.

Having another country transmit our proposal would at least get it in front of Hanoi and perhaps indicate tacit recognition by the intermediary of the reasonableness of our offer. However, it would stir the North Vietnamese sensitivities about third party involvement. This course would tempt Hanoi to reject our initiative quickly and flatly with no need for bilateral give and take.

This brings us to the third, and best, alternative, enlisting an intermediary in an active role. We would combine the new elements of our proposal with the weight of an influential and motivated third force. This should be done so that the negotiating process involves di-

rect talks with Hanoi and a deadline—the ambivalent North Vietnamese leaders will be forced to make a decision, and we will know in a sufficiently short time if a negotiated settlement is reachable.

There are only two logical candidates for the role of intermediary, China and Russia. They each have some influence in Hanoi and an approaching summit with us.

China, however, has little desire to get involved, a fact they have made quite plain in their private and public statements. By agreeing to your visit the Chinese have already paid a price in Hanoi and exposed their revolutionary credentials. They recall the 1954 Geneva Agreements with anguish, believing now that they helped to pressure their friends into a bad deal. They might fear that their direct role in a compromise settlement might open up Southeast Asian leftist movements to Soviet inroads. They might believe that failure of a negotiating effort involving them could jeopardize your trip to Peking. Finally, they have modest leverage on Hanoi since it is the Russians who supply the great bulk of military assistance.

This leaves the Russians. Based on their track record and standard approach, we can be sure that they have no great desire to help us, suggestive hints by Ambassador Dobrynin notwithstanding. But there are some factors which could nevertheless motivate Moscow to play a constructive part in arranging an Indochina peace. These include enhancement of their prestige and the establishment of their claims to a Southeast Asia role.

With these incentives already present we might be able to play on the Russians' paranoia about our rapprochement with Peking to enlist their assistance.

When Gromyko is here at the end of this month, we could appeal to him for a Soviet intermediary role. You would introduce the subject with him in a private meeting. I would subsequently speak to him along the following lines:

—We have two interests in improving our relations with China: our desire to communicate with 750 million people and our Southeast Asian concerns.

—On the first count, despite her massive population, China is essentially a regional power at this stage in history. For the near future peace on a global scale requires the cooperation of the Soviet Union and the United States.

—As for Southeast Asia, the conflict there makes for a distortion in our relationship, one that we wish to erase.

—We are prepared to make one last extra effort for a negotiated settlement to the conflict that would, in the bargain, improve Moscow–Washington relations and enhance Soviet prestige and influence.

—We would outline our eight point proposal, ask that the Soviet Union forward it to Hanoi and suggest it arrange a secret meeting in Moscow between North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong and myself. We would both be authorized to make a settlement based on this proposal within three days.

—As a global power, Russia could lend its broader perspective to Hanoi's natural preoccupation with its own struggle and morbid suspicion of the West. Moscow will understand that the U.S. is not withdrawing all over Asia so as to hang on in one small corner of the continent, and that the real problem is to avoid a total vacuum that would only invite Chinese dominance.

We would tell Gromyko that it would be helpful to have an answer within two weeks, or before I go to China. This timing would be both an incentive and pressure on Moscow. The Russians would get an institutionalized role in Southeast Asia, a secret trip and the prospect of some voice in our China policy.

If the response from Moscow and Hanoi were positive, I would brief Chou En-lai on the project while I am in Peking and secure benevolent Chinese abstention.

Sometime during November I would go to Moscow for the clandestine meeting and try to hammer out an agreement with the North Vietnamese.

The complete scenario for this proposed course is at Tab A.¹³ Its successful outcome would be clearly traced to your initiative with Gromyko when he was here for a visit.

If our effort fails, we would be in a much better position to go with option 2 in January, announcing withdrawals down to a residual force which we would maintain along with air support until our prisoners were released. Even the most dovish opponent could hardly claim he would offer more for a negotiated settlement.

If our negotiating effort succeeds, we could sign an agreement in principle in November or December. There could then be a final agreement and peace in Indochina by the spring of 1972.

¹³ Attached but not printed is a "Scenario," September 18, that covers the period September 20, 1971–September 1972.

258. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

Ambassador Bunker's Assessment of the Current Situation in Saigon

Ambassador Bunker has sent you his assessment of the current situation in Vietnam (Tab A).²

Bunker begins his message by reviewing political developments of the past summer. He believes all three principal players (Thieu, Minh and Ky) have behaved irresponsibly, but he holds Thieu most to account. He believes Thieu's stock, which was very high four months ago, has now fallen. By creating problems where few existed he has precipitated domestic turmoil and has created difficulties between himself and many of those around him.

Looking to the period between now and October 3, Bunker concludes that the degree of turmoil in the streets will depend largely on the tactics of the An Quang buddhist faction since other groups are too weak by themselves to create any serious trouble. Present indications are that the official An Quang leadership will not adopt a policy of taking to the streets because the violence could get out of control and play into the hands of the Communists or of Vice President Ky. An Quang has, however, issued a communiqué stating it will neither take part in nor recognize the results of the Presidential election.

Bunker rules out any real danger of a coup.

Bunker believes Thieu will win the referendum by a large majority of the votes cast with a high turn-out in rural areas but a substantially reduced one in urban areas. He believes that with his mandate of limited credibility, Thieu can expect to face continuous criticism from

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 872, For the President's Files, Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Vietnam Elections. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen." The following is written on the first page: "19 September 71(?)"

² Attached but not printed is a retyped copy of backchannel message 198 from Bunker to Kissinger, September 18. (Ibid.) Kissinger wrote to Bunker in backchannel message WHS 1102 to Saigon, September 16, that Nixon wanted Bunker's assessment prior to the September 20 NSC meeting. He also informed Bunker that Haig would travel to Saigon after the meeting to assess the military situation. (Ibid., Box 1013, Haig Special File, Haig Trip File, Haig SEA Trip–Mar 71 [1 of 2])

an enlarged opposition in the National Assembly and from political and religious groups.

Bunker believes that if Thieu does not change his style of leadership he will have a stormy second term. In politics, Thieu does not consult with others, he does not enlist others as genuine advisers and does not even cultivate natural allies. Bunker thinks Thieu should start building a genuine political grouping of forces and a wider base of support soon after October 3.

If for some reason or another, Thieu should find it impossible to govern, Bunker expresses confidence that the Vietnamese will try to find a Constitutional solution; and should matters come down to a question of Thieu's successor, Bunker believes Prime Minister Tran Thien Khiem would certainly make a bid and is better qualified than either Ky or Minh.

Regarding the enemy's political plans, Bunker does not believe they have sufficient cadre in Saigon to capitalize on a coup attempt or anti-government demonstrations. But, of course, they will exploit the situation as best they can encouraging demonstrations, urging an election boycott and attempting wherever they can to disrupt the election itself through military and terrorist action.

On the military side, Bunker judges that there is no area in South Vietnam, except possibly northern MR-1, where the enemy could launch a major big-unit offensive in the next two or three months. The effects of the Laos and Cambodia operations earlier this year are becoming increasingly apparent. The Communists' limited capability therefore will be directed toward small unit operations, guerrilla tactics and terrorism and primary emphasis between now and the end of the year will be on the dry season logistical movement.

Bunker ends his message by saying that the Vietnamization program is on schedule and continues to progress reasonably well. The most serious deficiency is that maneuver battalions are way below strength. The Vietnamese Air Force is steadily taking over more of the air support role although it is not equipped or trained to conduct interdiction operations in high threat areas of Laos. Its night support capability is limited and it has no heavy bombers.

Bunker concludes, therefore, that U.S. air support will be required for an extended period.

259. Memorandum for the Record¹

Washington, September 20, 1971, 3–4:40 p.m.

NSC Meeting on Vietnam

The President: I wanted to get together with you to go over our general line on Vietnam.² We are having a little respite, and I thought that this would be a good opportunity to have a meeting. What I wanted was to have a situation report on Vietnam and an indication of where we're going. We are now coming into a period in which there is an enormous amount of speculation about our future policy on Vietnam, both in this country and elsewhere, and needless to say, we must cope effectively with the situation. I will suggest a format for the meeting and not go on at great length. First I would like to have Dick Helms give a rundown on the political and military situation in Vietnam, and have Admiral Moorer follow with a discussion of the military situation. [To Secretary Rogers.] Bill, if you want to give a rundown on the political situation there, or if there are any others who have questions they would like to raise, I will want them to go ahead.

I will simply introduce by saying that our choices are pretty limited, as you know. We can, of course, do this or that, and can come to some conclusion as to what we want to do from the military and from the political standpoint. On the other hand, the situation is not one for discouragement, if we collectively hold good and tight.

Mr. Helms: There are many soft spots in the northern part of South Vietnam. There are security problems there. There is terrorist activity. How much benefit have the Communists gained from this? We can't really tell. But incidents will continue.

Thieu is still in control and will win over 50% in the election. There is confusion among the South Vietnamese people about how to cast a negative vote—particularly with the announcement made today.

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS–84, National Security Council, 1969–76, Meetings, NSC. Secret; Sensitive. According to the President's Daily Diary, the meeting took place in the Cabinet Room. (Ibid., White House Central Files) All brackets are in the original.

² In a September 18 memorandum to Nixon, briefing him for the meeting, Kissinger wrote, "Your top advisors should leave the meeting convinced that you are firmly set on a course that will terminate the conflict with dignity." He recommended that Nixon make the following points: the administration's record was impressive; the way the U.S. role in the war ended would greatly affect the administration's efforts to shape a new and balanced foreign policy; no administration official should do anything to undermine Thieu; there should be no speculation about the mid-November withdrawal announcement; and a strategy should be prepared to counter anti-war legislation in Congress. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 872, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Encore Sept. 71–15 Feb. 72)

The President: What announcement are you talking about, Dick?

Mr. Helms: President Thieu announced today that people could vote against him, first, by tearing up the ballot or tearing it in half; second, by marking an 'x' across it; and third, by putting an empty envelope into the ballot box. A voter can show his opposition to Thieu in three ways.

The President: That's not too bad. He has three alternatives.

Mr. Helms: Thieu has problems in his own camp. His own Prime Minister suggested himself as an alternative. Khiem thinks Thieu is in trouble. With the Army, a coup is unlikely unless the Army thinks American aid is jeopardized. There is always some chance of an irrational act. There is much talk, but less serious action. Thieu is in control, with few overt threats to his position.

From Hanoi, it looks like this: They see a political situation with possible instability. They see the U.S. domestic situation. And they see the atmospheric between what happens in the U.S. and what happens in Saigon.

They can create disorders, but they can't influence it significantly. Low level military action is also likely. We are coming down the home stretch, but they can't control the political scene.

Military action is also limited except in the area just South of the DMZ. Also the central highlands: There are considerable reinforcements going in and great potential there.

It is less clear about their possible intentions for the dry season. Their message is now less strident than a few months ago. There are no clear signals. There is little discussion in the documents about their strategy and tactics.

Our rapprochement with China may have put Hanoi off stride. They called the Chinese "opportunists". They have muted these comments now. Also, they probably can't figure the Saigon political situation. And the floods have caused a problem.

We should know soon whether they decide to do something.

The President: Could you spend a moment on Cambodia and Laos, Dick? Do the situations there have any influence on Vietnam, particularly in terms of how North Vietnam looks at policy toward Cambodia at this time?

Mr. Helms: The Cambodians have put the wet season to good use, and have gained control over some of the territory they lost as the dry season ended. This is not to say that if the North Vietnamese wanted to push them back, they couldn't do it. The question is whether or not the North Vietnamese will wish to make an effort of this sort.

In Laos, General Vang Pao has made a good effort and occupied much of the territory of the Plain of Jars, and has captured large stores

of food and arms. This makes it tougher for the North Vietnamese. However, as in the case of Cambodia, nothing has happened to prevent the North Vietnamese from pushing them back, and from making the same kind of military effort against Vang Pao as they did before. In the South, on the Bolovens Plateau, they had taken much more territory than ever before, but the Lao have taken back Paksong. I must say, this was a very significant victory. The North Vietnamese may come again, but it was still significant.

To recapitulate, looking at Indochina as a whole, the North Vietnamese have a question as to where they should put their priorities and make their major effort. They perhaps don't know where they will move, but they probably still believe that they can move back into the areas which were taken by our side.

The President: [To Admiral Moorer] Tom, do you have anything to add to what Dick has said?

Admiral Moorer: If I may, I would like to say a few words. First, Mr. President, adding a bit to what Mr. Helms said about Laos, the situation on the Plain of Jars continues to be that the North Vietnamese have the capability of moving Vang Pao back if they want to commit their resources to do this. At the Bolovens, the North Vietnamese must hold all this territory if they want to bring down logistical support from the Panhandle. Without these LOCs they wouldn't have access to the South.

Regarding Cambodia, there are two kinds of operations going on. One is an independent type carried out by the Cambodians themselves such as Operation Chenla II.³ The encouraging part of this operation was that the Cambodians have been able to exercise control, provide logistical support, and handle operations on their own in a semi-professional way. Elsewhere in the country, all the LOCs into Phnom Penh are open. There are a number of main routes which radiate out from the city. We did have that attack on the oil tanks this morning, in which 14 out of 29 tanks were hit, but these can be repaired in two weeks and with the LOCs open there shouldn't be an emergency in Phnom Penh. General Lon Nol is very ambitious, and has plans to move above the so-called Lon Nol line and reoccupy areas occupied by the North Vietnamese.

The other type of operation to which I referred is cross-border operations by the South Vietnamese, which have been somewhat restricted due to the floods. Efforts are being made by General Abrams and General Weyand to get better South Vietnamese and Cambodian cooperation. Significant progress has been made at the division and regimental level, and coordination is getting better all the time.

³ Abrams sent his most recent biweekly report on Cambodia, including the Chenla II Operation, in COMUSMACV message 171025Z to CINCPAC and CJCS, September 17. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 CAMB)

Regarding South Vietnam, I agree with Mr. Helms on the situation in MR I. The North Vietnamese saw fit to withdraw two regiments back into North Vietnam. There is no question but that the Lam Son 719 operation just concluded seriously inhibited the capacity of these units to operate, and they had to pull back to refit. The military action which we had expected during the Lower House elections didn't materialize. However, the North Vietnamese have just created a new division, the 22nd, out of other forces in MR I, and when they flesh this out they will have added a whole new division to the MR I forces.

In MR II, as Mr. Helms has said, the sensitive area is that of the Central Highlands. MR II has the weakest leadership. MR III has been fairly stable, except for one ambush near the Cambodian border. The ARVN operation in the U Minh forest has been extremely well conducted, and is indicative of a growing capability of the ARVN to operate on its own. Five hundred enemy have been killed, weapons and supplies have been captured, and there have been a considerable number of defectors. It is true that a significant number of PF units have been overrun in MR IV, but the number has been decreasing—there were four in August, and two in September. We were concerned about this matter last June, but General Abrams reported two days ago that the situation has stabilized and is not indicative of a deteriorating situation.

In sum, Mr. President, I can say that Phase I of the Vietnamization Program has been completed, and that Vietnamization is working. There are leadership problems in MR II, but this is being given attention. It will also be necessary for the North Vietnamese to reconstitute their logistical system before resuming operations. We can expect terrorist operations such as fire-bombing, particularly in urban areas, but I don't expect Main Force operations unless the North Vietnamese are prepared to commit themselves deeply across the DMZ or in some other area, for instance across the Cambodian border.

The President: To what extent have U.S. forces dropped below 200,000?

Admiral Moorer: We're holding to the line which you established, Mr. President. We will be down to 184,000 by December.

The President: I have noticed that U.S. forces have had very low casualties. Is this because they are in defensive positions, and there are no search and destroy operations?

Admiral Moorer: No sir, all operations of that sort have been turned over to the South Vietnamese. We had only 13 casualties this week. Most of the casualties are caused by aircraft actions and by booby traps.

The President: Yes, I had understood that our forces were mostly in defensive positions. I saw that we lost a helicopter. Are we still giving helicopter support to the South Vietnamese ground forces?

Admiral Moorer: This type of support is continuing, and we will back up the South Vietnamese with fighter aircraft and helicopters.

Secretary Laird: We must be careful in talking about U.S. actions. We still have artillery bases which are ours, which must have infantry protection. These bases would get socked unless the troops went out and searched for the enemy and didn't give warning.

The President: Of course, they just can't sit there, and there has to be patrolling to protect the bases. Do U.S. forces still play a primary role in I Corps? Where are they located?

Admiral Moorer: U.S. combat units are primarily in I Corps and some in III Corps. Many of the other units are at Cam Ranh Bay packing up to go home.

The President: To what extent are you concerned about the enemy buildup threatening the DMZ and I Corps?

Admiral Moorer: I don't see any immediate threat to the friendly forces is I Corps.

The President: How do you analyze the enemy buildup—the roads through the DMZ, and the enemy forces above it?

Admiral Moorer: Mr. Helms' comment about the buildup was motivated, I believe, by an intercept saying that enemy forces were beginning to move. However, we don't have indications other than this. The enemy could move, but we would want broader information about enemy forces coming south. There is only an indication that they may move.

The President: Does anybody else have anything to say?

Admiral Moorer: I think we have given them the opportunity. From the military point of view, the South Vietnamese should be able to pull their own weight and provide their own security. This is not so much a matter of hardware and equipment, but of political structure and national will.

The President: I agree. They have the equipment, weapons, and airforce which the other side doesn't have.

[To Mr. Helms] To my great surprise, I noticed in reading the *New York Times* story about demonstrations which the students in Saigon were pursuing, that there was little popular support for the students. But on the other hand, wires said that these demonstrations were serious. Could you put what is happening into perspective? We've seen coups before, and there have been fire bombings—how do these things look in terms of popular support?

Mr. Helms: I think all these things are minor episodes. The demonstrations have been spirited, but the police have got going quickly, only a few students have been involved, and there has been no evidence that the people in the streets have gotten in at all. All of them were students in the group which the TV cameras focused upon. We haven't

been able to find any sign that any of these short, sharp demonstrations have had a significant effect.

The President: What about Ky? Is he plotting against Thieu, and does he have the support of the students?

Mr. Helms: We have had good indications in the last 24 hours—we have good penetration of Ky's organization—that he is stirring up all his followers but the indications say that he intends to take opposition in a legitimate way with no coup.

The President: What evaluation have you or State had prior to this meeting on Minh's backing or stimulating demonstrations?

Mr. Helms: He is more active again and serious in his opposition to Thieu, but regardless of this, Thieu has the power and will stay the course. I believe that he can handle the situation unless something unforeseen comes up, such as an assassination.

Admiral Moorer: General Vien is the most stabilizing element in that country. He does not participate in political activity, and is highly regarded by the military.

The President: General Vien? Who is he?

Admiral Moorer: He is the Chairman of the Joint General Staff.

The President: Oh, yes. He doesn't get involved in politics?

Admiral Moorer: No. For example, in Operation Lam Son 719, he was quite frank in his comments. He said that Thieu was interfering and preventing the operation from proceeding in the best way.

Dr. Kissinger: He also had a few things to say about General Lam.

Admiral Moorer: Yes, he did speak about General Lam and the situation in MR I, but his comments were full and frank.

The President: Looking at Vien from the standpoint of political stability, do you consider him a possible subject for leader of a coup, or would he stand by Thieu all the way? Would he be for the Government as it is?

Admiral Moorer: He would resist a coup.

The President: Would he take program direction from us?

Secretary Laird: I have travelled with him through all of the Military Regions. He has some questions about the situation, but this is normal for the leader of the JGS.

The President: Go ahead, Mel, and follow up with your analysis of Vietnamization.

Secretary Laird: I believe that the military and political situation is quite favorable. The logistics build-up has gone ahead more rapidly than anyone had thought possible. We are telescoping what had been planned for the next 11 months into a 2-month period, and will have all the paperwork done by September 30. This is going to surface a lit-

tle bit more, because we have all those ships unloading, and tanks coming down from Japan. We have accelerated the training of four helicopter squadrons, and moved up the completion of this training from June 1972 to six months in advance. We are turning over the equipment of the 22nd Division in MR I. I have talked to Thieu about this.

The President: We are getting out of tactical air support, I believe.

Secretary Laird: Yes, we are going ahead with the turn-over of two tactical fighter squadrons and two airlift squadrons and moved the transfer ahead from mid-1972. The date depends on the availability of the aircraft for transfer. We are not yet up to a general manning level of 90% for the combat divisions, but we will be there for sure by 1 January for the combat units. Today we are at a level of 205,000 U.S. forces, and your date of 184,000 by December 1 will be met. Actually, the number will be just a little under this, but we have the 184,000 figure as a target.

As to what the troop levels will be, I have tried to shut up speculation coming from Saigon and elsewhere about future levels. I have taken your comments in your press conference of September 16 and sent them to all commanders and told them to try to hold this line. I'm afraid, though, that this logistics thing may break. I told Dr. Kissinger that if it does, it will come from the South Vietnamese because it would be to Thieu's advantage to let it be known.

The President: I suppose that this is because it would show that he's being backed.

Secretary Laird: Yes. When those tanks come down from Japan, Thieu will want to show them off a little. However, I told General Vien of the JGS on a very classified basis that even very few people in the Defense Department know about this. But there will be some stories.

I believe it is very important for us to know where we will be on December 1. We will have only five brigades, five air attack squadrons, and four helicopter squadrons, and will be down to a level where 67% of our men and materiel will be out. 75% of our combat forces will be gone. That's quite a change. But we will still be able to maintain a capability in the air.

The President: We don't count carriers as part of our forces in Vietnam, do we?

Secretary Laird: We never have; we've never included carriers in our ceiling. Our friends in the press have been trying to bring them in, but as far as General Abrams and DOD are concerned, we are not going to start now. We might need an appropriate increase in our force ceiling for Thailand of some 500 to 1,000 men, but I don't believe this should cause a problem since we are down to a level of 32,000 from well over 50,000. Because of this we could have a few more air force

personnel. I do think, though, that with respect to air support for the South Vietnamese, our program is well in hand. There should be no question that the kinds of support needed will be made available. We have the capability of surging B-52's, and are now flying 32 to 33 missions per night, mostly in MR I and in the southern half of the DMZ against the road network there. The enemy has been pulling forces north out of this region as a result.

The President: Have we ever used B-52's in North Vietnam?

Secretary Laird: No.

The President: We have never used them there, but have come close to the North Vietnamese border from time to time.

Is there any reason for our not using B-52's over North Vietnam? Is it because they are more vulnerable? Of course, I'm not thinking of bombing Hanoi.

Secretary Laird: We have put them in on the passes fairly close to the border.

Admiral Moorer: We have had attacks against from them anti-aircraft guns, but haven't lost one yet.

The President: I take it the reason is that they might be vulnerable. It would be a great psychological victory for North Vietnam to shoot one down, and their use has been restricted to South Vietnam.

Secretary Laird: There has been no mass bombing of the North, and the decision was not to hit civilian centers, but only to use tactical fighters to go in and take out certain targets. We haven't used mass drops at night.

I don't have anything further to say except that I don't see how we can deliver more on our program or get the South Vietnamese to assimilate more equipment. Some of the equipment which they are now getting won't be used until February or March, but we are getting the paper work done. There is one thing I can assure you, as Tom [Admiral Moorer] has said: the will of the South Vietnamese to fight is something we can't determine.

The President: Is it your judgment that they are fighting rather well?

Admiral Moorer: Yes sir. General Abrams has sent in a message⁴ saying that he considered they had done very well, although they had suffered casualties. He was quite pleased.

Secretary Laird: One thing which we should remember is that a major war is still going on. Just because our losses are down, we should

⁴ Not further identified.

not forget that the South Vietnamese losses are running at 20,000 a year, and that this is a very large figure. When you take into account the estimate of the North Vietnamese coming down, and assume that the estimate of 100,000 casualties on their side is correct, then 120,000 men are being killed in two countries of less than one-twentieth of the population of the United States. So we don't want to give the impression that Vietnam is not an active place, and that there's no shooting and people being killed.

Admiral Moorer: North Vietnamese casualties have been pretty much in a straight line, and haven't been reduced. There's still a war there.

The President: [To Secretary Rogers] Bill, do you have any comment on the political situation?

Secretary Rogers: I would like to comment on one thing which you spoke about in your press conference:⁵ the South Vietnamese elections. There is not much dispute even among our critics that the Parliamentary elections were fair by our standards and fairly conducted. All we can say about the Presidential elections is that we are disappointed, and that we have made every effort with respect to Thieu, whose judgment up to now has been good. If he had encouraged Ky and Minh to run, he would have won anyway. We now must accept the fact that the referendum is going ahead. We can expect some disorders but not massive disorders, and I think that Thieu will get a substantial victory, much more than 50% of the vote—a lot higher. We have to remind ourselves in this case that there is no alternative. Ky would not be desirable to the liberals, and we can't say he would be a natural leader of the Vietnamese people. Looking at the situation from both our standpoint and from their standpoint, Thieu is the best man. Minh is weak, and wouldn't be a good leader, but the unfortunate thing is that election is not being held in a way we would want. Within this room, I can say that it's our failure as well as Thieu's, but we have no alternative but to go ahead—to work with him, encourage him, to try to get a free country, but not punish him. He is increasingly suspicious of his opponents, of the Buddhists, and of the U.S., and will be difficult to deal with after the elections. But we have to deal with him, and not let anybody think that we would deal with anybody else. What you said in your press conference couldn't have been said better.

One other thing—I noticed a rash of stories over the weekend about troop withdrawals and what you have planned in the way of reductions.

⁵ Reference is to the September 16 press conference; see footnote 3, Document 257.

I hope that we can avoid this kind of speculation, which is very harmful. If we can just hold the line until your next announcement—.

The President: Does anybody else wish to say something?

Secretary Laird: Until we get the things which we need approved by Congress, we shouldn't have any announcement. That's why the 15 November date is just about right.

Secretary Rogers: One thing, there is a dangerous amendment before Congress, Senator Montoya's, which would move that we would not give assistance to Vietnam until we get a fair election.⁶ It would state that we want a fair election. But Thieu has said that he would resign if the U.S. cuts off aid, so this might generate the feeling "let's help him do so."

The President: It would be the last election.

The Vice President: I feel that politically and emotionally we're on the eve of a rather violent resurgence of agitation against the war notwithstanding the substantial progress of Vietnamization and the decreased activity of the enemy. Actions by such political figures as Senator McGovern, and the feeling in the press that in some way they can get a terminal date, has stimulated within the political community a kind of activity in which Vietnam is not on the back-burner. A number of candidates will be running with left-wing support in the coming elections, too. One thing which we've forgotten is that Big Minh is the idol of these people. They don't remember that at the time of the unfortunate Diem incident, Minh was in the position of helping to overthrow Diem. He didn't take hold at all.

Dr. Kissinger: And Minh was put in as a man who we thought would guarantee a continuation of the war effort.

The Vice President: Exactly—our friends have forgotten this. We shouldn't acquiesce in this bubble coming to the surface about what a great man he is. It seems to me, Mr. President, that our tack is for us to continue emphasizing the obvious success of your policies, the low casualties of our forces, and reminding our people about the peace proposals we have put on the table in Paris, staying strongly with your position. What's happened in the past is that we've been hammered day to day in the press to make the kind of concessions which the liberals want, and the people forget what our position is and confuse it with the position of the liberals. Then some writer gets a statement from somebody in the bureaucracy indicating that maybe the President's policy is wrong, and we're affected. We must be extremely strong in support of

⁶ Senator Joseph Montoya (D-NM) announced on September 12 that he would introduce an amendment to the Military Procurement bill requiring the administration to withdraw all U.S. troops if it could not certify that Thieu would have an opponent. (*The Washington Post*, September 13, 1971, p. A3)

our policy, and to be conciliatory only encourages opposition. We should say it's working, stress this, and forget new initiatives.

Secretary Laird: I would like to add one point to what the Vice President has said. The situation in Paris, it seems to me, is pretty sterile. I am concerned, though, over one thing which is going on about which we should be careful not to set ourselves up. This is the POW thing, where we have no leverage. The only leverage we have is humanitarianism, where we can embarrass Hanoi all over the world. But if we get in and give them a big chip, it would be a very bad thing. People are continually trying to set up the POW issue as a political thing.

Secretary Rogers: We should be very careful about emphasizing the importance of the POWs at Paris, otherwise in a few months we'll again be in the position of fighting the war to get the POWs back.

The President: That's exactly the way to put it. That's what they were looking for in their 7 Points.

Secretary Rogers: Paris has taken a back seat lately, and shouldn't be put back in front.

The President: What I would like to suggest is this: Is looking silly on the American front, if not before the entire world, worth an understanding in Paris?

The Vice President: Should we think about laying out the negotiating record?

Secretary Laird: There was a *Detroit News* report yesterday saying that the president of the UAW, and also the president of the NAACP, were going to organize a demonstration outside the Union League Club. They were going to demonstrate over your price freeze, and also over Vietnam, and had sent out invitations to people to take part. If, as the Vice President said, there is a danger that anti-war activity will return, this would be a test. Should we accept this as a test, and face it head on?

Secretary Rogers: To answer your question, I think the Vice President's point is one we've got to keep in mind. The timing is important, and if something is going to develop we should do what he suggests. But I don't believe we are yet at that stage. If it looks about to build up, we should do it, but I believe the President is on such high ground it wouldn't be necessary. Maybe we could restate our position at the UN. From the height of Paris, we wouldn't know what we would get into.

The Vice President: We should be ready to do so.

The Attorney General: The Democrats have scheduled a lot this fall, and there is much going on up on the Hill. The answer is to get information from our friends up on the Hill.

Secretary Laird: The Democrats have now caucused, after which we got a couple of people to shift their vote on the draft bill.⁷

The President: Of all people, Mansfield told the caucus—he put it to them—that the draft bill was important in political terms as well as in terms of Vietnam. He said that the Democrats had put us in every war since World War II, including Vietnam, and they couldn't let the Republicans end the Vietnam war.

Secretary Laird: I can tell you that some people up there called after the caucus. They said that they had not been for the draft bill, but were for it now.

The President: That's because Mansfield went too far. I'm surprised that he did this. He's deeply emotional about his amendment, he believes in it deeply, but to put it in this way was surprising.

Secretary Rogers: There are about 10 amendments to the Military Procurement Bill, and four amendments to the Foreign Assistance Act, with all kinds of amendments on appropriations. We will have a whole series of such amendments, but there is no alternative but to face up to them.

The President: In particular, when the Greek amendment⁸ comes up they will say to cut off aid. Why? Because Greece doesn't have democratic leaders. Yet, of the 91 countries all over the world to which we give aid, only 30 have leaders who are there as a result of democratic elections. In two-thirds of these countries, the leaders are not there due to elections which we would consider democratic. Does this mean, though, that we should cut off aid? Even in places such as Colombia and Mexico I understand that the changes have not been, strictly speaking, democratic.

Mr. Helms: Can we be sure of these figures?

Dr. Kissinger: We got them from you.

The President: So when the argument comes up that they want an amendment about Greece and Vietnam, some "bold boy" should say cut off aid to all undemocratic countries, and then watch those boys scream.

⁷ Laird is referring to the extension of the draft in the Selective Service Act (HR 6531), which had included Senator Mansfield's amendment on troop withdrawals. Previously, in June, the Senate had passed the amendment, which called for the withdrawal of all United States military personnel from Indochina within 9 months. However, the House of Representatives refused to accept the amendment. Consequently, Senate–House conferees devised a compromise that declared it was the sense of the Congress that the war be ended at the earliest practicable date, which the Senate accepted on September 21. ("Senate Votes Cloture, Passes Draft Measure," *The Washington Post*, September 22, 1971, p. 1)

⁸ Reference is a House amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act restricting aid to Greece.

Secretary Rogers: I don't think anywhere near 30 countries have our kind of election.

Dr. Kissinger: For example, we can't say that Guyana was in that category.

The President (to Secretary Connally): John?

Secretary Connally: I suspect we are going to have demonstrations because the opposition wants to revive the Vietnam issue, but I don't believe that these can be successful. We can have demonstrations instigated or manufactured by revolutionaries, but it seems to me that your policy is a winning policy. I suggest, though, that we try to take out of the war the element of South Vietnamese fighting North Vietnamese. That's not why we are there; we are there to stop Communist aggression. That's what you have done. To the extent that you have a friendly press, it is emphasizing that you have opened up to the Chinese and the Russians, so you mustn't let headlines appear about soldiers being lost in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. What's happened is that you've won. We are not losing many men, but to the extent you can keep casualties down you are better off. The Vice President is right, though, that in Paris you won't get anything, and you're on dangerous ground. However, you've turned the whole thing around from what the situation was several months ago.

The President: We had assistance in this from the North Vietnamese. McGovern walked in after meeting with them and said that they would release the prisoners if we set a date, and they then said, "hell no."

The Vice President: The way to use this is to say that even they—people like McGovern—now know that the North Vietnamese can't be trusted.

Secretary Laird: I agree with John (Secretary Connally) on the thrust of his remarks. John, the first time I went to Vietnam after our elections,⁹ the first question General Abrams asked me was how much time do we have—12 or 18 months. We've done pretty well, that was almost three years ago.

The President: Yes, but we've been just one jump ahead of the sheriff, the whole time.

Secretary Connally: I think we have more time today than we did a year ago.

Secretary Laird: About military assistance, we've got to have support. Assistance becomes more and more important over the next three years, very important to the direction in which we are going. The way

⁹ Laird traveled to South Vietnam February 10–17, 1969.

it is, there is a three-year proposition in which aid will be at a very massive level, but then it can be pared down. If military assistance is handed over to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, though, we will be in real trouble.

The Vice President: The VC know that the best way to get to the American people is by means of U.S. casualties. They succeed in their mission if headlines appear saying that other American troops are being moved in and 100 Americans have been lost. They would get a demonstration from this.

The President: Let me say, they have some restraints on them, too. They shed blood and suffer casualties, and they are restrained at this moment.

Secretary Connally: The bureaucracy is talking and anticipating your policies, and I don't think this is a position anyone ought to take. Nobody should talk except the people you specifically designate to do so.

The President: It's difficult to stop this because so many people know about our plans. Much of it seems to come from Saigon.

Secretary Laird: The speculation goes in two ways. One is that you are going to delay further troop withdrawals, and the other is, then, that you will withdraw everything. We've gotten word out to our people, and I don't know how I can make our position any clearer.

Admiral Moorer: We have sent a message, and the plan is classified.

Secretary Rogers: We have more time with the public, but this is not so with respect to Congress. The situation is quite dangerous there.

The President: I believe we must keep the Congressional critics off balance, certainly until December 1. After that, depending on what we say, they might come out again and get in front. I agree that it might have hurt in the Committee for Mansfield to take such a political line, but deep down such a man is going to believe that way. It's a helluva thing—look at what happened in Korea. So I agree with Bill's point, that Congress is the problem and not the people, although there is a public aspect too. It's not difficult to stir up the Democrats—look at Woodcock, for example—because they're such a tightly controlled group. We shall see.

Let me sum up by saying that I think that everybody is pretty much on the same track. What we have to do is see that our policy is consistent with the analysis of the situation and of our goals which we have made here.

First, with regard to the next announcement, you should simply say categorically that you don't know what I will say and that I will determine this next November. What we said before is a good position: the situation may change, and we will analyze it then. Will there

be a final announcement? You don't know, you don't know this, that, or the other thing.

There should be discipline throughout with respect to Thieu and the South Vietnamese Government. We have to recognize that with the best of intentions the behavior of the U.S. in Vietnam has not really been all that bright. (I know Thieu very well; I met him first in 1956.) The murder of Diem in which we were involved to a disgusting degree set off a turn of events which gave encouragement to the country, and we became mired down. Maybe this would have happened anyway, I don't know. We took the road of instability. Having elections during a war is very difficult, particularly a civil war, and it is a hard thing, too, to insist on having all the precedents we have in peace time. Thieu is the leader and is having elections just the same, even though Vietnam never had elections before. Our choice may be difficult, but the only one there who can run the country is Thieu. Whether there will be a referendum or elections, and the people vote for or not for, Thieu is the only one there. Ky can't do it, and Minh is unbelievable. There's a real war on, finding a new leader is very difficult, and we're going to back Thieu. He might be shot, but don't say anything about that because it might encourage them if we say that if there was a coup we would assess the situation and maybe get out. We must take that hard line.

In terms of our general policy, POWs, and negotiations, we must put the best face on what is a perfectly good line. Of course, we've gone through a lot—the demonstrations in 1969, the Cambodia demonstrations, and those last May, but we're still around. We have been able to survive. Looking down the road, let me separate out the policies and interests of the country. Politically looking at the short run, we could have used Thieu's failures to get out. Considering that in this country we are being asked why we have stayed as long as we have, the people would heave a sigh of relief. We could have lived with that for a year and a half. Then the consequences would come—an unmitigated disaster in terms of our foreign policy in the future. When you look at all the countries we support around the world, a considerable number must have some doubts about the U.S. Because of neo-isolationism, our moves towards the Chinese and the Soviets, and the Nixon Doctrine itself, there are surely some doubts that the U.S. can be relied upon. After the U.S. let Diem down, that is after the murder of Diem, for us to say that Thieu is out because he didn't do what we wanted—I can see the whole thing unravel starting from Southeast Asia, Indonesia, and Thailand, and all the way to Japan. What we really confront is what has been a long and terrible trial for U.S. foreign policy: will it fail or succeed? Whoever thought that we would be in this position, with Vietnamization working, and the Vietnamese capable of defending them-

selves? 17 million people can now live under a non-communist government, even though it is not necessarily free.

Leaving the elections out, there is no doubt about what happened in North Vietnam after the Communist take-over. 50,000 people were murdered there, and one-half million North Vietnamese have been killed in this war. What will they do with the people of South Vietnam if they walk in? You can just imagine. So as we look down the road, we can say that we have a good record but we are tired. We can say that we have lost 45,000 Americans and Thieu won't behave, so we're getting out. The American people would like this for awhile, but after the elections would very much dislike it. If it ends that way, I am convinced that we would have a disaster from the world point of view in the things that we are doing.

Looking at the positive side of America, we have done many good things. The China initiative is very important, even though we only agreed to discuss differences. We do have differences with China, but within 15 years it will be a significant power, and the question is will we discuss these differences or fight about them? So we're starting now. The same is true with respect to the Soviets. We give a little, and they give a little, and no position has changed. To be able to play these games, it is doubly important that the U.S. not fail in Vietnam, otherwise those 91 little countries are going to say: "My God, can we depend on the U.S.?" So, realistically, we have to see it through, and the way is to stand by Thieu and support him. We will make another announcement on Vietnamization in November, and face up to it. We must stick through this way.

We have a few bolts to shoot too, against those who nitpick and say we should bring out a few more men or that we are going to make massive moves on the world scene.

Thank you.

260. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, September 23, 1971.

SUBJECT

Highlights of My Talk with Dobrynin on September 20, 1971

Dobrynin requested a meeting with me on his return from consultations in Moscow. The most significant developments in our talk were his comments on U.S.-Soviet relations and his delivery of a new Soviet offer to play a role in Vietnam diplomacy. The full record is attached. (Tab A)²

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

The question of Soviet involvement in Vietnam diplomacy has of course come up before in my talks with Dobrynin. (He offered on March 25, for example, to carry a message to North Vietnamese leaders attending the Party Congress in Moscow;³ on July 29, I suggested to him that now was a useful moment for Soviet intervention.)⁴ But this new Soviet offer I believe is particularly forthcoming and concrete; it is an offer to try to bridge the differences, not just to carry messages. It comes against the background of your China announcement and the whole new tone of U.S.-Soviet relations. And it is especially timely from our point of view.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 872, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Encore September 1971–15 February 1972, President's Speech January 25, 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for information. The date is handwritten.

² Attached but not printed. The September 20 memorandum of conversation is printed in full in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIII, Soviet Union, October 1970–October 1971, Document 330. Kissinger noted that Dobrynin handed him the original text of a letter from Brezhnev to Nixon, September 7, sent in response to Nixon's August 5 letter to him (see *ibid.*, Document 309). Concerning Southeast Asia, Brezhnev commented favorably on Hanoi's recent proposals in the talks with Kissinger and wrote, "if the United States has embarked on the course of withdrawing its troops from Indochina, then, it seems to us, there should be no obstacles to setting a final date for their complete withdrawal." He asked, "why not accept the idea of establishing in South Vietnam a government of national accord." Kissinger forwarded the letter to Nixon under a covering memorandum, September 17. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 492, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1971, Vol. 7 [Part 1])

³ See Document 165.

⁴ See Document 239.

261. Memorandum From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, September 27, 1971.

SUBJECT

Southeast Asia Trip, September 20–26, 1971

On September 20, a team composed of three representatives of the National Security Council and one representative of the Department of State departed Washington to conduct a survey of the situation in Southeast Asia, with emphasis on the security situation in South Vietnam. The team returned to Washington via CINCPAC, arriving the evening of September 26. At Tab A² is the team composition and a detailed itinerary.

The following is a summary of the findings concerning the political, economic, and security situations in the Republic of Vietnam.

Political Situation

Despite a deep sense of disappointment within our mission in Saigon with respect to the current political situation, President Thieu's decision to proceed with the October 3 referendum has caused:

- little controversy in the countryside where most voters live;
- vocal opposition among urban political groupings;
- a policy of violent confrontation in a very small minority of city dwellers with some leadership from the Vice President. Despite exaggerated press reporting, the violence thus far has stirred hardly a ripple in Saigon or elsewhere;
- no known serious coup planning;
- no serious threat to Thieu's prospects for a "victory" in the referendum.

However, it is apparent that during the post referendum period, there is serious risk of an erosion of Thieu's control and support if he does not institute positive reforms designed to broaden the base of his new government and move, at least ostensibly, against the more flagrant kinds of corruption.³ A detailed report is at Tab B.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 157, Vietnam Country Files, Viet Sept 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

² Tabs A–D, attached but not printed.

³ Haig met with Thieu on September 23. See Document 268.

Economic Situation

This economic stabilization program continues to be very successful. Price increases in 1971 should be in the 10% to 15% range, well below the past levels of 30% to 40%.

President Thieu is planning another set of far-reaching reforms for October. They include a major devaluation. This devaluation will be the key step toward limiting inflation in 1972 to 10% to 15%.

There is a slight political risk within South Vietnam if import prices rise sharply as they will when the reforms are executed. One-third of South Vietnam's goods are imported. But President Thieu appears confident he can bear these risks; and the GVN appears determined to lessen its dependence on U.S. assistance.

The best way to insure that U.S. assistance is not cut by our critics in the Congress is to launch an economic development program. One has now been designed by our Mission and the GVN wants to implement it. Plans now are to launch this program on January 1, 1972, but it could be implemented earlier by President Thieu.

You will be informed later of the decisions required, and it may be appropriate for you to take a personal role in launching the program.

A detailed report is at Tab C.

Security Assessment

The latest reports on the pacification situation show that GVN control of the rural population is 69% countrywide. Of more importance, GVN control in southern South Vietnam (MR's III and IV) is about 75%; in areas in the northern part of the country (MR's I and II), it is around 50%.

The resources and plans for pacification in the Delta and Saigon areas practically guarantee continued pacification progress against likely enemy threats through 1972. In the northern part of the country, there is a serious question whether pacification progress can be sustained in the face of the likely enemy threats.

The potential problem results from U.S. redeployments and the incentives they could create for a North Vietnamese offensive. While there is practically no solid evidence on enemy intentions and capabilities for the upcoming 1971–72 dry season, analysis shows that if the enemy mounts an effort similar to last year's, he could set back the GVN's pacification effort at least temporarily in northern South Vietnam and perhaps temporarily occupy a highland city like Pleiku or Kontum. Of course, if one optimistically assumes the enemy will not infiltrate resources at a level approaching last year's level, the GVN's prospects are very good.

Vietnamese forces have the capability to pre-empt to some degree even the enemy's best efforts. They can do this if they take actions to strengthen their forces and execute cross-border operations to pre-empt enemy attacks.

The GVN must mobilize additional forces in the northern part of the country, increase the pay of combat soldiers countrywide, modify its draft and personnel allocation policies to raise the manning levels of its combat units to 90%, and remove selected division and regimental commanders who by all accounts border on the incompetent.

At your direction, Secretary Laird and General Abrams have sought these changes. But President Thieu's response has been slow. This trip provided me with an opportunity to impress again on President Thieu the need for decisive action in these areas. He seemed to understand what was called for and intends to act.

President Thieu is planning to execute cross-border operations toward Kratie in Cambodia and on a limited quick-stroke basis into southern Laos. These will play a key role in limiting Hanoi's options.

With regard to U.S. forces, the political and security situations in South Vietnam justify some acceleration in U.S. redeployments, beginning on December 1st.

Assuming no negotiated settlement, residual U.S. functions of helicopter, tactical air, and limited advisory, logistics, and intelligence efforts can be adequately maintained at a U.S. force level of approximately 50,000, provided it is correctly designed.

A detailed report is at Tab D.

262. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, September 28, 1971.

Nixon: What I was going to say: let's try to game plan this,² Henry, to see how the hell we can. You've got two different problems: who gets the credit? Well, on that problem, we don't have any—

Kissinger: They can't get the credit in my view.

Nixon: Well—

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 579–15. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. The exchange is part of a larger conversation, 5:51–6:42 p.m.

² Nixon, Kissinger, and Haldeman were discussing the new version of the Mansfield amendment which Nixon signed into law that day. See footnote 7, Document 259.

Kissinger: Because even—

Nixon: Well, I think that I—that’s a matter of judgment. My guess—my own feeling is that they’re more likely to than you think due to the fact that the press will play their game, and that the press is going to make it—say, “Well, look, they’ve passed it.” But, that is not the main consideration. My main consideration is not who the hell gets the credit, but whether or not their goddamned initiative is going to screw up what little chance we have on the negotiating front. See my point—?

Kissinger: Well luckily, they’re a little bit passé, because I don’t think—one reason we have delayed every one of these concessions is because you and I have known that it would just lead to the next one. That the cease-fire, we knew, was going to open up the deadline issue, and the deadline issue is going to lead to the overthrow of Thieu issue.

Nixon: That’s right.

Kissinger: So—

Nixon: That fellow Scott³ brought it up today. He said, “What are we going to say next week after Thieu’s election?” I don’t think it’s going to be any worse after Thieu’s election than it is before his election. [unclear]

Haldeman: I don’t think it will be as bad.

Nixon: Huh?

Haldeman: I don’t think it will be as bad, because he—

Nixon: You think so?

Kissinger: That issue is—

Haldeman: They’ll bleat for one day about it was a lousy election; they’ve been bleating for months that it’s a lousy election.

Kissinger: And then the day after we have the China announcement.⁴

Haldeman: Then you announce China, and so what?

Kissinger: See, that China thing is, is—

Nixon: Hmm?

Kissinger: —going to help us.

³ Probably a reference to Senator Hugh D. Scott (R-PA), Senate Minority Leader, who, along with other Republican leaders in Congress had met with Nixon and members of his staff from 4:23 to 5:21 p.m. to discuss pending legislation. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President’s Daily Diary)

⁴ The announcement that Kissinger would visit China was made on October 5.

Haldeman: It splits, Henry, from that viewpoint, too.

Nixon: It's going to help us?

Kissinger: Well, it's going to help us: A) it takes some of this steam, again, out of the North Vietnamese. They have not—I don't exclude, Mr. President—

Nixon: [sighs]

Kissinger: I think there's a 10 percent chance, but it isn't impossible, that the Chinese may want to get the visit—cancel the visit, somehow or other, and that they'll want me there to, you know, to have a pretext for doing it, saying we couldn't agree. I think there's a very—there's almost no chance that they're doing that. But, these are not, basically, our friends.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: And I don't believe it.

Nixon: Well, if it happens, it happens.

Kissinger: But if that happens, that would be as true at the end of November.

Nixon: That's true. Well, what the hell. I'd just be—we'd just be stoic about it. What the hell. Don't borrow any trouble there. So, if it happens, it happens.

Kissinger: I don't think that will happen—

[Omitted here is further discussion of the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union.]

Nixon: Well, on the negotiations, though, let's look at that. I—I think you've got to recognize that, that from a political standpoint, they are probably right—probably—because [unclear] and in a sense, they're saying, "Well, look, the Senate, finally, and the Congress, finally, forced the President to, and moved out in front of him." You see? That's my view. But, forgetting that, I still come back to the proposition that I think it could be extremely harmful to the, you know, to the—your message [unclear]—

Kissinger: Oh, extremely. Of course, it will be very, very harmful.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: Except that they are no longer prepared to trade a deadline for withdrawal. That's the thing we've got going for us.

Nixon: Yeah. So, we've got a little something to give them that they—the Senate isn't giving them. Well—

Kissinger: But, it would be a hell of a lot better, Mr. President, if it didn't happen.

Nixon: Well, we're going to try. We're—I got everybody lined up; I read the riot act to the whole goddamn bunch.

Kissinger: And we also should keep our own people quiet now for a few months here. Laird will be a problem when he starts traveling.

Nixon: I'll get him in before he goes.

Kissinger: But I—I think when all is said and done, Mr.—well, you have some, and I have no political instinct—if we should succeed in ending the war by negotiation, I don't give a damn who passed what, you're the one who did it, and—but especially if we go on the attack and accuse them of nearly killing it. They can't say they made us do it. We offered it in May, already.

Haldeman: That's the thing; you've got the record.

Kissinger: I'm beginning—I think the average person now thinks that you're getting us out of the war. They don't know whether you're planning six months, nine months, or whatever. They think you're getting us out, and that these guys should stop yelling at you.

Nixon: Well—

Kissinger: That is—

Nixon: —that's something—

Kissinger: —that is my feeling of [unclear]

Nixon: —[unclear] but I must say that—and this doesn't—I'm not—the only thing that really concerns me about this is the fact that the—this negotiating initiative. If we didn't have that—

Kissinger: It will—

Nixon: —I wouldn't give a goddamn what they passed.

Kissinger: No, it hurts—

Nixon: But, if it is—my point is: if it hurts, maybe it screws it totally. And we just might have to take another look, and see what will we even go on.

Kissinger: I think—

Nixon: Well, are we're going to go?

Kissinger: I think we need it for the record, and I think we should go on it. And I think this one—now that we've got Thieu's promise, I think, if they're willing to settle for anything short of unconditional surrender, they're going to take this, with some modifications. They won't accept the first formulation.

[Omitted here is discussion related to Kissinger's forthcoming trip to China.]

263. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, September 30, 1971, 6–8 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko
Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

Contrary to the usual practice, the meeting took place not in the Ambassador's apartment but in a formal reception room on the first floor which I had not previously seen. Both Dobrynin and Gromyko went out of their way to be cordial.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

Indochina

The conversation then turned to Vietnam. I told Gromyko that we considered the North Vietnamese a courageous people, that had fought heroically for many years. At the same time, we were wondering whether the qualities of heroism that they had shown made them capable of having peace. I frankly was beginning to doubt it. Some suspicion was indicated as a result of their history, but when suspiciousness was carried to such morbid lengths then of course it was impossible to come to any understanding. Gromyko said that they had many reasons to be suspicious.

I said we were now in the last phase of the war and we were determined to end this one way or the other. We would either go unilaterally, which we were reluctant to do, or we would go by way of negotiations. However, I wanted Gromyko to understand that if the negotiations did not succeed by the end of this year we would have to go unilaterally, with all the risks to the *détente* that this involved. It seemed to me a tragedy for the Soviet Union and the United States to run the risk of conflict over an area in which they had many common interests. What did we want in Southeast Asia? We wanted countries

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 492, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1971, Vol. 7 [Part 1]. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting was held at the Soviet Embassy in Washington. Kissinger forwarded the memorandum of conversation to Nixon under an October 5 covering memorandum in which he emphasized that Gromyko was interested in his proposal to meet with the North Vietnamese in Moscow. The memorandum of conversation is printed in full in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIII, Soviet Union, October 1970–October 1971, Document 343.

that were independent and self-reliant. Any reasonable assessment of the historical situation should make clear that we were not the major threat to the independence and security of Southeast Asia, and that the day might even come that the countries of Southeast Asia would look to us for support against threats that came from much shorter distances. Why then should the war continue? Why should they assume that we would maintain a colonial position when we were withdrawing from so many other areas?

As far as I could see, there were only two issues now between us: the withdrawal and the political future. I thought that the withdrawal issue was manageable. As for the political future, it was impossible for us to end a process which had begun with the overthrow of an ally with the overthrow of another ally.

Gromyko responded that he understood our point but he was just wondering, thinking out loud, whether some compromise might not be possible. For example, would we be willing to replace Thieu and have another person in his place who might not in the first instance have Communists in his government? Would that be acceptable to us? I replied that we were in the process of reformulating our political proposals and I was therefore not able to respond with great precision. I could tell him now, however, that we would not agree to the replacement of Thieu as a condition of the peace settlement. We were prepared, however, to work with Hanoi on a political process in which it was possible to replace Thieu as a result of the political process. For example, we did not insist that Thieu had to run the elections that might be set as a result of the peace settlement; the elections might well be conducted by a government that was not dominated by one of the contenders. Gromyko asked whether we might be prepared to agree to a fixed period after which elections had to take place. I said that was correct. Were we prepared to have Communists in the government that would run the election, he asked. I said perhaps not in the government but certainly on the commissions that would supervise the election.

Gromyko said, "All right, we will pass this on to Hanoi and we will be in touch with you." I told him that this was not a formal proposal, and perhaps Hanoi had another idea.

I then told Gromyko that I wanted to say in all solemnity the following: We were determined to see the war in Vietnam through to an honorable conclusion. We thought that from now until the end of the year was the last opportunity for a negotiated settlement. After this we would be forced to make our decisions unilaterally and not rely on negotiations. We would make a specific proposal to Hanoi in the near future. When that proposal was made, we might talk in greater detail to Dobrynin. To show our goodwill and to ease Hanoi's suspicions, I continued, we were also prepared to offer the following: It might be that

Hanoi would feel easier if one of its friends helped to assure the good faith of the participants. I was therefore prepared to go secretly to Moscow to meet for three days with a suitable personality from Hanoi if this had a high probability of leading to a solution. It could not be either in Moscow's interest or mine to have a trip to Moscow that led to failure.

Gromyko responded that this was a very interesting proposal, which they would consider with the utmost seriousness. He repeated again, "We will do what we can and we will be in touch with you."²

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

² In backchannel message WH10882 to Kissinger, who was en route to Beijing, October 16, Haig wrote the following: "D[obrynin] called and stated that while he did not have a response for you on Vietnam last evening he has since received one from his government. D stated the ideas which were brought to his Foreign Minister's attention by you were conveyed to the leadership of North Vietnam. In principle, the North Vietnamese side is prepared to continue contacts with the American side to try to find agreement on the quickest way of ending the war. The North Vietnamese side prefers to use the mechanism which already exists in Paris, especially the confidential talks with you." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 492, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1971, Vol. 7 [Part 1])

264. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, September 30, 1971, 3:15 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

The President

Brigadier General Alexander M. Haig, Deputy Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs

A. Toumayan, Interpreter/Notetaker

Souvanna Phouma, Prime Minister of Laos
Ambassador of Laos

After an exchange of greetings, the President expressed his satisfaction at how well things had gone during the last dry season and also commented on the fact that the enemy had been contained.

The Prime Minister responded that his forces contain the enemy and have retaken some of the lost ground but they expect an early return of NVA forces who will certainly open a new offensive. Hanoi has suffered much from the floods but as soon as this is over, next month in fact, new troops are expected to come into the Plain of Jars. For some reason Hanoi has the idea that the Plain of Jars can be used as a starting point for aggression against North Vietnam.

The Prime Minister said that in April 1964 he had a long conversation with DRV Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap who had told him that North Vietnam would never tolerate the presence of troops other than Pathet Lao in the Plain of Jars. The Prime Minister affirmed that we must speed up the training of the irregulars, particularly the Thai, so that we have a strong body of forces to use against the enemy push which is certain to come during the next dry season.

The President inquired about the morale of Lao troops who have been in battle for so long. Are they discouraged or are they hopeful? The Prime Minister responded that they have their highs and their lows and that some officers are easily discouraged.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 758, Presidential Correspondence, 1969–1974, Laos, Souvanna Phouma Correspondence. Secret. The meeting took place in the Oval Office and ran until 4:10 p.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) Holdridge forwarded the memorandum of conversation to Haig under an October 1 covering memorandum. Haig approved it and Holdridge's recommendation that it be sent to the Departments of State and Defense and the CIA. Kissinger met with Souvanna on October 1. At one point, Kissinger stated that he considered the Soviet Union's attitude toward Laos to be ambivalent: "it was not in the USSR's interest to leave a vacuum in Southeast Asia that China could fill, so he thought the USSR would like to see independent countries in Laos and Cambodia." (Ibid., Box 549, Country Files, Far East, Laos, 1 July–31 Dec 1971)

The Prime Minister remarked that he has just relieved the commander of MR IV and reassigned him to the general staff in Vientiane. He said that Vang Pao, the Meo leader, also tends to become easily discouraged. Over all, however, morale is good considering that Lao forces have been fighting since 1949 without leave, and under conditions of poor equipment and poor pay. He remarked that, with its population of 3 million, Laos has 100,000 men under arms. The Prime Minister expressed his particular gratitude for U.S. support of Thai forces which are fighting in Laos.

The President inquired about the present status of the Pathet Lao and its morale.

The Prime Minister replied that there are two currents within the Pathet Lao, one deeply committed to Hanoi and bound to it, the other, lower ranks, now understood that they were doing Hanoi's work for them. In recent months 1,000 Pathet Lao soldiers had defected and as Hanoi becomes more arrogant toward Laos there would be increasing desertions.

The President asked if the Prime Minister believed there were any U.S. prisoners of war in Laos. The Prime Minister stated that he believed there were some in Laos and that North Vietnam had probably brought some to Laos where there were more hiding places in the caves and the mountains and where the nature of the terrain made surveillance of the prisoners easier.

The President wondered how one could get intelligence on this and the Prime Minister agreed that it was very difficult to penetrate those areas. He had tried unsuccessfully in connection with requests from U.S. parents of prisoners of war for information.

Asked if North Vietnam was getting stronger or weaker, the Prime Minister answered that it is getting morally and physically weaker having lost during the Dien Bien Phu period those officers who were the pride and glory of their army. Whereas in 1962–63 government promises of rewards for capturing North Vietnamese soldiers were fruitless, since 1965 about 100 prisoners had been captured and an additional number had surrendered. The Prime Minister added that North Vietnam had suffered greatly from bombardments and had been devastated by the floods. There were reports of hundreds of thousands of casualties. He pointed out that the whole Red River Delta lies very low, is protected by the dikes and that the population there is very dense.

The President asked for the Prime Minister's reaction and advice concerning his visit to Peking.

The Prime Minister said he would not presume to advise the President but was highly satisfied that the President had taken this initiative. Laos approves and applauds the President's decision. If the President had some influence in Peking this might help bring peace back

to Southeast Asia and Laos could resume its normal existence. Laos could then devote its resources to economic development and not to prosecution of the war which now takes up more than half the national budget. The Prime Minister said he felt that the President's influence in Peking would be substantial. Perhaps the President could convince Peking that the United States has goodwill and that it is prepared to live in harmony with all nations rather than interested in dominating the world as the Communists now argue.

The President pointed out that it was more important that the Chinese convince us that they did not want to dominate the world. He was not going to Peking with naive expectations. There were differences between the two systems, and there would inevitably be areas of divergent interests. All the visit means is that we are beginning the long road of negotiation on differences. We would like to reach with the People's Republic of China the position we now have with the Soviet Union. We have many differences with the Soviets on Berlin, strategic arms, and the Middle East. We are negotiating about them. We would like to reach the same stage with the People's Republic of China.

The President asked what the Prime Minister believed to be Hanoi's real reaction to the President's planned trip to Peking.

The Prime Minister expressed the view that Hanoi fears a change in Peking's attitude toward North Vietnam and that there would be pressure on Hanoi to moderate its ambitions. Ho Chi Minh had always felt he would replace the French in Indochina. That is why Hanoi had created and maintained the Pathet Lao to use it in Laos as an instrument to establish a communist regime under its control. This applied to Cambodia also. The Prime Minister had told the Secretary of State that, even if the war ended, Laos would still need help to survive because China and North Vietnam would continue to help the Pathet Lao in the political struggle.

The President emphasized we are aware that the end of the fighting does not mean the end of the war. He stated that his intentions were to obtain from Congress means to support our friends but we face growing difficulties. His philosophy was that we will continue to aid the countries along the rim of China which would be threatened by aggression. He renewed expressions of support and friendship for the Prime Minister.

In conclusion the Prime Minister asked the President to urge upon Peking and Moscow strict adherence to and compliance with the 1962 Geneva Accords on Laos.

265. Memorandum From K. Wayne Smith of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

Ceasefire

Introduction

Pursuant to the SRG's instructions at its July 21, 1971, meeting,² the VSSG Working Group has completed a summary paper on Indo-China ceasefire terms (Tab B).³

The summary paper boils down the earlier analysis⁴ by providing sets of terms encompassing main force and control war variants for South Vietnam and terms for Laos and Cambodia. It also seeks to provide a conceptual framework for relating the mechanics of ceasefire to the larger political issues at stake.

The SRG also asked that Mission comments be obtained. These were received on August 21, 1971 (two weeks late) and are at Tab C.⁵ They provide a useful critique of the paper considered at the July 21, 1971, SRG meeting but not of the summary paper to be considered on Friday.⁶

Brief Summary

Conceptual Framework—After contrasting Hanoi's view that a ceasefire must be part of a final settlement with the U.S. view that it should be the first step toward negotiations, the paper concludes that if there is any possibility of a ceasefire, it would appear to be in the realm of some concession on our side (e.g., a fixed withdrawal date) in conjunction with a belief on Hanoi's part that its cause would profit from a period of low level political-subversive conflict followed by a final settlement or a resumption of hostilities.

Sets of Terms—Two extreme and two mid-range sets of terms are provided. Common to all sets of terms are the following assumptions and general provisions:

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-59, WSAG Meeting, Ceasefire 10/2/71. Top Secret.

² The SRG meeting was held on July 22. See Document 235.

³ Tab B, entitled "Alternative Sets of Cease-Fire Terms," August 23, is attached but not printed.

⁴ See footnote 2, Document 235.

⁵ Tab C, telegram 13445 from Saigon, August 21, is attached but not printed.

⁶ The paper was discussed at the October 1 SRG meeting; see Document 266.

Assumptions:

- U.S. redeployments continue at about present rates.
- U.S. advisors and selected combat service support elements remain.
- Allied aerial reconnaissance over Indo-China continues as does GVN/U.S. coastal surveillance.
- Economic aid to the GVN, GKR, and RLG continues.

General Provisions:

- Hostile military acts including terror and coercion cease.
- Augmentation of forces (personnel) or supplies beyond replacement levels is prohibited.
- Population resettlement except by special agreement is prohibited.

Alternative Sets of Specific Terms:

—*Alt 1: Hanoi's Choice*—For South Vietnam: Main forces and territorial forces freeze in place (200 meter patrolling limit). Current ICC investigates complaints and Joint Military Commission works out details. Laos would be partitioned in accordance with current force dispositions (the PDJ could be neutralized). Cambodia partitioned on Lon Nol line, and GVN forces withdrawn to SVN while communist forces can remain in sanctuaries south of Lon Nol line.

—*Alt 2: Best for Allies*—For South Vietnam: Enemy main forces regroup in sanctuaries, friendly main forces freeze in place, friendly local forces patrol up to 2 km, and a strong ISB monitors supply and personnel movements in South Laos and main force locations in South Vietnam. Laos terms are the same as for Alt 1. GVN forces withdraw from GKR if all communist forces move northeast of Lon Nol line and free travel on Routes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and the Mekong is assured.

—*Alt 3: Middle Range Option with Strong ISB to Monitor Resupply and Infiltration*—For South Vietnam: Friendly and enemy main forces freeze in place, GVN local forces patrol to 2 km, and a strong ISB monitors trail entry into South Laos but not in place locations of main forces as for Alt 2. Forces in Laos and Cambodia are divided by line and GVN withdraws from Cambodia.

—*Alt 4: Middle Range Option with Only ICC Monitoring*—Exactly the same as Alt 3 except that ICC is only monitor which means there is no effective supervision of either locations of enemy main forces or resupply and infiltration at the entry points into South Laos.

Outcome Assessment—Two basic criteria were employed to assess outcomes: (1) Whether or not the enemy could locate, resupply and infiltrate personnel for a major offensive; and (2) the extent of control changes of the *rural population* over six months and one year.

Main Force Buildup:

—Alt 1 would not preclude a large-scale enemy buildup within six months.

—Alt 2 would preclude an enemy buildup within six months or one year.

—Alt 3, even though enemy forces are not in sanctuaries would prevent a main force buildup within six months by its strict resupply terms and strong ISB at the trail entry point into South Laos.

—Alt 4's terms would not preclude a main force buildup within six months.

Control Outcomes:

The table below summarizes the projected control outcomes.

	<i>Control Now</i>	<i>Percent of Rural Population</i>	
		<i>In 6 Months</i>	<i>In a Year</i>
Alt. 1 Hanoi's Choice	GVN 66	54	37
	VC 2	22	36
Alt. 2. Best for Allies	GVN 66	61	57
	VC 2	19	23
Alt. 3 Strong ISB	GVN 66	58	47
	VC 2	20	29
Alt. 4 ICC Monitoring	GVN 66	56	43
	VC 2	21	33

Negotiability Assessment—Very briefly, the negotiability assessments for each option are:

—Alt. 1 would be easiest to negotiate with Hanoi. Its forces would be relatively unrestricted and the ICC would be predictably ineffective. GVN control forces would be tied to their outposts. Hanoi could opt for a main force build up or pursue protracted war. The GVN, GKR, and RLG would balk at Alt. 1's terms.

—Alt. 2 would probably be non-negotiable with Hanoi because Hanoi is unlikely to permit its forces to be regrouped in sanctuaries subject to international supervision. Nor would Hanoi permit unrestrained GVN police activities. Hanoi would probably balk at international inspection at the entry point of the trail in South Laos. The formation of a 14,000-man ISB would also be an obstacle to the negotiability of this option. While the GVN would be attracted to most of the provisions of this option, it would probably reject the provision for enemy main force sanctuaries within the boundaries of South Vietnam.

—Alt. 3's provision for a main force freeze in place without ISB supervision thereof might interest Hanoi. However, Hanoi might balk at the 2 km radius of operation for GVN territorial forces and an ISB

role monitoring inputs into the trail in South Laos. Up to 6,000 ISB personnel would still be required. The GVN would be attracted to the ISB role in South Laos but reluctant to forego ISB inspection of enemy main forces. The GVN might live with this option.

—Alt. 4, because it dispenses with an ISB would be more acceptable to Hanoi than Alt 3 but less acceptable to the GVN. The rate of GVN control losses projected for Alt 1 declines for this Alt because territorial forces could operate up to 2 km. But the GVN could not restrain itself beyond six months in the face of such losses. It is unlikely the GVN would accept even these losses and the risk of an enemy offensive within six months.

Mission Comments

The Mission comments are on the paper encompassing the detailed analysis of ceasefire terms considered at the July 21 SRG rather than the paper to be considered at Friday's SRG. Thus, the Mission's views are in many respects outdated. Nonetheless, the comments are useful. The Mission's major points and my comments thereon follow:

—(1) The Mission notes that political issues should be discussed along with specific ceasefire terms. This comment has been dealt with conceptually in the new paper, but an analysis of the political carrots the U.S./GVN could offer to gain Hanoi's acceptance of more favorable ceasefire terms was not undertaken. At Ambassador Sullivan's request the VSSG was directed to steer clear of political issues.

The Mission's views are inconsistent on this point. On the one hand the Mission acknowledges that political concessions from our side would be necessary to interest Hanoi in a ceasefire. Yet, the Mission judges Hanoi's response to the specific sets of terms within the narrow framework of Hanoi's ceasefire preferences—a view that overlooks possible Hanoi concessions on ceasefire to obtain linked political concessions from the U.S./GVN.

—(2) The Mission reports it has no evidence of changes in the GVN's views on ceasefire as reported over a year ago. The Mission could have said with equal veracity that it has no evidence that the GVN's views have not changed. The GVN's views formulated a year ago were hastily contrived and there is abundant evidence that little thought went into them. There is, in my view, a good chance that the GVN's views have changed or would change if we raised the issue with them.

—(3) The Mission's view is that the terms that are least desirable from a security standpoint appear to be the only "practical" choice from a negotiability standpoint. I have several problems with this view.

First, the Mission does not take a position on appropriate control terms; therefore, the foregoing judgment provides no basis for opting

for the new paper's Alt. 1 (Hanoi's choice) over Alt. 4 (2 km radius for GVN territorials).

Second, as noted above, if our side makes substantial political concessions this could have an impact on the ceasefire terms Hanoi would accept.

Third, who knows what Hanoi thinks? I am concerned that our experts are reading their tea leaves too closely. Perhaps we should float a set of terms relatively advantageous to us just to probe Hanoi's views.

—(4) The Mission seems to be of two views on GVN effectiveness in a ceasefire. On the one hand, it judges that GVN morale would suffer more than communist morale. On the other, the Mission believes the GVN leadership would be more effective than does the VSSG. The two examples of GVN effective activity cited, propaganda and police activity, are those in which the VSSG finds the GVN most deficient.

—(5) The Mission believes that there are self-adjusting aspects to a ceasefire that could facilitate its self-enforcement over a reasonable period. In other words, the Mission seems to be suggesting that even if we started down a path not too advantageous to the GVN (e.g., alternatives 1 or 4 in the new paper) the risks would be minimized by the GVN's ability to assert itself to halt a serious deterioration, even to the point of resuming hostilities. I believe there is some truth in this point. I cannot imagine a ceasefire lasting more than six months, unless there is substantial progress in the negotiations. Surely the GVN will protect itself. In my view, however, this probable GVN response should not serve as a justification for our advocacy of a non-supervised in place ceasefire on terms favorable to Hanoi. The risks would be too great and such a ceasefire embarked on with the assumption that the GVN would break it would be little more than a tactic. I am not sure the benefits of such a tactic justify our accepting Hanoi's terms and the associated risks that GVN could not halt the decline in its position. Such a tactic could also backfire politically if the GVN resumed the war.

—(6) We have heard informally via the JCS that the original MACV position on ceasefire was altered substantially in the course of reaching a Joint Embassy/MACV position. MACV had cabled the JCS in the back channel indicating it favored the sanctuary option (Alt. 2). But it appears MACV fell off this position. The JCS has asked MACV for a new reading on its position.

Where Do We Go from Here?

There appear to be several alternatives on future courses of action short of an actual initiative. We could:

- (1) explore the subject with the GVN;
- (2) develop more detailed political/ceasefire scenarios;

—(3) move the issue to a final decision, perhaps at the NSC level, on the assumption that, while the uncertainties are great, they are not going to diminish;

A decision among these choices involves issues on which I have little knowledge.

If we move toward a final choice now (course 3 above), we could:

—Choose Alt. 1 or Alt. 4, the most negotiable options on the premise that Hanoi will reject the others out of hand. If we did this, we would forego the better options, risk GVN opposition, and assume the ceasefire would be self-enforcing.

—Propose terms more favorable to our side (Alt. 2 or Alt. 3) in an effort to gain political credit and find out what Hanoi thinks.

—Take steps to implement a set of terms unilaterally. For example, we could state Alt. 2 terms and move unilaterally toward their implementation by standing down ARVN main forces in a freeze in place and limiting territorial force operations to 2 km. We could continue bombing in Laos and Cambodia pending evidence that Hanoi is not infiltrating supplies and personnel for a major offensive. If Hanoi appeared to be scaling down its activities, we could go a step further. If Hanoi persisted, the GVN could resume main force activities.

—Take no ceasefire initiative and let the war continue.

Talking Points

Your talking points are at Tab A.⁷

I recommend you read the papers at Tabs B and C.

⁷ Tab A, Kissinger's talking points, August 27, are attached but not printed.

266. Minutes of a Meeting of the Senior Review Group¹

Washington, October 1, 1971, 3–3:45 p.m.

SUBJECT

Ceasefire

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

Mr. U. Alexis Johnson

Mr. William Sullivan

Defense

Mr. David Packard

Mr. Armistead Selden

Major Gen. Fred Karhos

JCS

Lt. Gen. Richard T. Knowles

Brig. Gen. William C. Burrows

CIA

Lt. Gen. Robert E. Cushman

Mr. George Carver

NSC Staff

Dr. Wayne Smith

Mr. John Negroponte

R/Adm. Robert Welander

Mr. Mark Wandler

Mr. James T. Hackett

It was agreed that:

—Options 1 and 4 of the *Alternative Sets of Ceasefire Terms*² are not preferred. The choice between options 2 and 3 will depend on the political context at the moment of negotiation and the negotiation itself.

—The Vietnam Working Group will prepare studies on: (1) the actions, on both sides, which will be triggered by the start of negotiations; and (2)³ the separate monitoring of military violations and infiltration violations of the ceasefire.

—The State Department will prepare studies on the most practical possibilities in the POW and political settlement issues and build hypothetical models which we can use as points of reference, if and when the circumstances arise.⁴

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-112, SRG Minutes, Originals, 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. All brackets are in the original. Jeanne Davis forwarded the minutes to Kissinger under an October 5 covering memorandum and Kissinger read them on November 6.

² Reference is to the August 23 paper prepared by the VSSG for this meeting. See Document 265.

³ Johnson forwarded the study to Kissinger under an October 27 letter. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 157, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Oct 71)

⁴ Johnson forwarded the study under his October 27 letter.

Dr. Kissinger: I thought we should briefly review the ceasefire paper. I see from reading the papers that my staff likes sanctuaries. The sanctuary idea has been knocked out at least five times, but every time the papers are revised, the idea comes back in again.

If the war ever ends with negotiation, and one could not guess that from what's going on in Paris now, then a ceasefire would be an essential element. We might review where we stand with respect to a ceasefire.

There are four options. All of you are familiar with them, so there's no sense in reviewing each one in detail. The first option is considered to be the most negotiable. It calls for main forces and territorial forces to freeze in place, with a 200-meter patrolling limit. The current ICC would investigate complaints, and a Joint Military Commission would work out the details of the settlement.

My staff claims that the second option is the best for the Allies. This would put the enemy main forces in sanctuaries, while the friendly main forces freeze in place and friendly local forces patrol up to two kilometers. A strong ISB would monitor supply and personnel movements into South Laos, as well as main force locations in South Vietnam. I think we would have to know where the sanctuaries would be placed before we make a judgment on whether this is the best option or not.

Dr. Smith: I agree. This has been in the back of our minds. If you recall, in the first study,⁵ we said the sanctuaries would be located away from the population centers.

Dr. Kissinger: For this to be the best option, we would have to assume that the sanctuaries were located away from the population centers. It is not self-evident, though, why the other side would accept that [sanctuaries away from population centers].

The third option, one of the two middle-range options, calls for friendly and enemy main forces to freeze in place, for GVN local forces to patrol up to two kilometers and for a strong ISB to monitor Trail entry into South Laos. Option 4, the other middle-range option, is the same as 3, except that the monitoring is done by the ICC.

As far as I know, Hanoi has never expressed its view of what it expects a ceasefire to be. There's a difference in timing: they want the ceasefire to come at the end of the settlement process, while we want it to come earlier. They have never stated their understanding of what they mean by a ceasefire.

Mr. Sullivan: They have gone on about the phony ceasefire: they stop shooting at us when we get on the ships. But they have even been vague about that proposal.

⁵ See footnote 2, Document 235.

Mr. Johnson: That's right. The only thing they are clear about is that the ceasefire comes at the end of the settlement process, when a coalition government is already formed in South Vietnam.

Dr. Kissinger: Even so, they have never defined what they mean by ceasefire. They have just been explicit about the timing. Is that correct?

Mr. Johnson: Yes. The assumption is that it comes at the end of the settlement period. They have never defined a ceasefire in any way as a prelude to a settlement, but always as the conclusion.

Dr. Kissinger: We don't know how they define a ceasefire. The way they define a political settlement, though, means there will be no forces left. I don't think a ceasefire is their paramount concern.

Would we consider option 1? Can we accept the limitations of that option and the monitoring by the ICC?

Mr. Packard: One thing stands out in all the options. They [the options] assume that the swing population goes over to the VC. VC control of the rural population is only 1 or 2 percent now. All the options, though, assume the VC will pick up the swing population.

Dr. Kissinger: Is that assumption wrong?

Mr. Packard: That's not the point. It may be right. But to the extent the government can maintain effective police actions, its control will be more effective. We now assume the swing population is under GVN control during the day and under VC control during the night. All the options, though, assume the VC will gain control of the population during the day and night, and, therefore, there really isn't much difference between the options. Option 1 is the least favorable. But if we can help the GVN assert more effective police actions, it will have more effective control and option 1 could be more acceptable.

Mr. Johnson: I understand your point. You're saying there is an enormous range of variables which affect these calculations.

Mr. Packard: Basically, I think the analysis is good. Option 1 is the least acceptable because the VC control goes to 14 percent after six months and to 23 percent after a year. Option 2 is better because the VC control goes to 12 and 14 percent. I'm not sure, however, all of the factors considered here have been placed in the right priority. A strong ICC or ISB would help, of course. At the same time, if we counted on effective policing, this would make any option more acceptable.

Dr. Kissinger: We have to take into consideration two things in regard to violations of the ceasefire: (1) actual combat actions and (2) reinforcement capabilities. The combat actions can be monitored, in part, by an ISB, and we can try to have the local forces in balance. The other question is reinforcement.

Mr. Packard: The only way to make this [monitoring of reinforcement capabilities] more effective is to have more supervision.

Dr. Kissinger: Just for the purposes of this discussion, I'd be inclined to be more lenient in regard to combat violations, compared to infiltration violations. If I recall correctly, our analyses of last year indicated they were getting 15 to 20 percent of their supplies through. If we just have a rough inspection system, they could cut down their supplies by 50, or even 75, percent—a noticeable reduction. With a bombing halt, however, everything would be getting through. On top of that, if they have a military standdown for a couple of months, they could very easily build up their supplies and launch a major attack.

Mr. Packard: Henry, you just brought up the \$64 dollar question. Would they devote most of their effort to staging a buildup and launching a major attack or to increasing their control of the swing population? I think we have to worry about both.

Dr. Kissinger: That's true. The answer to the question about increasing control is to strengthen the GVN local forces so that the other side will find it too costly to pick them off. I think they will concentrate on building up for an attack.

Even if we strengthen the GVN local forces, the other side could tip the scales by cutting down on its infiltration, but still have more supplies come in than if the bombing and combat were continuing.

Mr. Packard: You're right. Can we detect this infiltration? Even more important, can we do something about it if we do detect it? We might get some signals about increased infiltration, but not enough to know for sure. Can we do anything to make sure we get first-hand information about what they are doing?

Dr. Kissinger: Have we done any studies on what it would take to monitor the supply situation?

Mr. Sullivan: We have done some. The studies indicate we can stop the infiltration with about 12 men, with 3-man teams at each of the four passes from South Laos into South Vietnam. When the new road is completed through the DMZ, we would need another 3-man team. I'm talking about the infiltration of supplies, not men.

I think, though, that this focuses on another problem. The study is not set in a larger context. True, it does have annexes on Laos and Cambodia, but it doesn't look at the overall settlement situation. In October, 1970, we put a ceasefire first in our total settlement picture. The other side put it last in its seven-point proposal. The study does a good job in its frame of reference, but it is not really practical.

Dr. Kissinger: I detect a little sting in that remark. Is the study useless?

Mr. Sullivan: No. I think it provides a good term of reference from which to negotiate.

Dr. Kissinger: I agree. We can't float a ceasefire proposal without a political framework.

Mr. Sullivan: In the worst possible case, a coalition government would come to power in Saigon and would be amenable to North Vietnam. Then we wouldn't have to worry about a ceasefire.

Mr. Packard: I'd like to return to what Bill [Sullivan] said before. I don't agree that we can control the infiltration with 12 or 15 people. I think we should check that again.

Mr. Sullivan: That presupposes the other side is willing to accept people at the passes. And if that is the case, you know they made a political decision not to send the supplies through.

Mr. Packard: The Trail is so complex. I think we need a more sophisticated inspection system than 10 or 12 people.

Mr. Sullivan: Another study indicated we would need an ISB of 7,500 people—if we assume they are trying to beat the system.

Dr. Smith: On page 23 of the study, our calculations show that they would need only eight additional trucks per day in order to build up for an offensive in MRs 1 and 2. This, I think, gives some indication of the added supplies they would need to get through.

We were also aware of the general political framework in which the ceasefire should be placed. In the second paragraph of the paper, we say we are going to describe the general concept framework in which ceasefire terms might be considered, without, however, attempting to relate these terms to the political and other issues of an overall settlement.

Mr. Johnson: We're not saying you weren't aware of the political framework. A major variable, though, is the political appeal of the government in Saigon and its effectiveness. Did you base your study primarily on a straight-line GVN political appeal?

Dr. Smith: Yes, it's fair to say that. We used 1970, rather than 1968.

Dr. Kissinger: Do you think we can devise a system which would prevent them from getting additional trucks through per day?

Dr. Smith: CIA says, "No."

Mr. Packard: We certainly can't do it with 12 men.

Mr. Sullivan: I said we could do it with 12 people, provided the other side is not fighting the situation.

Gen. Cushman: If they are carrying out their re-supply by truck and we negotiate the stationing of teams at the passes, it's one thing. But it's another thing if they are back-packing the supplies in and trying to cheat the system.

Mr. Sullivan: If they are going to cheat, they would not agree to the 12 observers in the first place.

Mr. Packard: I'm not so sure about that.

Mr. Sullivan: They didn't agree to having inspectors in 1954 or 1961.

Mr. Packard: I mean that I don't agree with the statement that if they permit 12 inspectors, we should trust them.

Dr. Kissinger: We have to be concerned about two things: (1) monitoring the infiltration system, and (2) monitoring actual violations of the ceasefire in military actions. We need a more detailed study on what kind of system we want and the levels of tolerance it can sustain. We cannot assume that if they permit 12 inspectors, that would be sufficient. If they don't permit 12 people at the passes, what do we do?

Mr. Johnson: If they don't agree to 12, they certainly won't agree to 7,500.

Mr. Packard: I can conceive of something in between.

Gen. Knowles: Option 2 calls for an observer force of 14,000.

Dr. Kissinger: Is that figure broken down into elements concerned with infiltration and combat violations?

Gen. Knowles: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: How many would be involved with the monitoring of the infiltration?

Gen. Knowles: About 4,000.

Dr. Kissinger: I don't think they would permit 10,000 men to monitor their military activities.

Mr. Packard: With a few hundred mobile inspection teams we could have a more acceptable system.

Mr. Sullivan: That was tried in 1962 with the ICC observers, but they shot down a helicopter.

Gen. Knowles: That doesn't show very good faith on their part.

Mr. Packard: When they do that, the ball game is over.

Mr. Johnson: What would we do if we had a mobile system like that and if they shot the helicopters down?

Mr. Packard: I guess we would have to go back to the drawing board.

Dr. Kissinger: The ultimate sanction, of course, is the strength of the South Vietnamese. If they violate the ceasefire, we can step up our military supplies to the South Vietnamese.

Mr. Packard: If there are violations, we can certainly increase the gunship actions.

Mr. Sullivan: I think the North Vietnamese would accept a ceasefire if they are on the verge of achieving their goals in the South anyway, or if they make the political decision to settle for what they have at the moment. From our point of view, the ceasefire should be a trip wire which can be maintained with a minimum number of people.

Mr. Packard: (to Mr. Sullivan) I think there's also a third possibility, Bill. They could look upon the ceasefire as a temporary expedient

and put great emphasis on the local control situation. They could just wait for the opportune moment to renew the hostilities again.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Packard) You are right. I think this is a distinct possibility. It's clear they would do this under option 1, and it's probable under option 3. I think it's more probable that they will want to preserve their base and achieve a settlement which gets us out of South Vietnam and which results in a weaker South Vietnam. Then they can build up their resources and go on the offensive again. If they don't get the kind of settlement they want, we must assume they will violate the ceasefire. We must, therefore, devise a ceasefire which will be tough for them to violate.

Mr. Johnson: How can we come up with a ceasefire proposal which they will accept and which will be difficult for them to violate?

Dr. Kissinger: If they are not going to accept a ceasefire, then we are simply wasting paper. However, if they come to us one day and say they would like to talk about a ceasefire, we at least will be able to tell them what we want.

Mr. Packard: I think the paper is a good reference point in this regard.

Dr. Kissinger: What choices do we have if they ever say they are ready to talk ceasefire? Regardless of what their motivation is, what would we say to them?

Mr. Packard: Normally, we would start with the proposal most advantageous to us: sanctuaries.

Gen. Knowles: Option 2 is the best for us.

Dr. Kissinger: Do we tell them that they must go into sanctuaries while we remain in the countryside?

Gen. Knowles: We could say that, after all, it is our country.

Dr. Kissinger: I'm not sure they would accept that.

Dr. Smith: There is one important factor in all of this that should not be overlooked. We must judge how long we expect the ceasefire to last. After six months, the decline in control loss is relatively small—and the GVN still remains in control of the rural population. The real difference is between six months and a year.

Mr. Sullivan: The ceasefire would presumably be part of some other movement in the negotiations. We have had some experience with this in Paris. For example, if there were progress on negotiating a ceasefire, we would expect progress on other things, as well. We would expect other movements related to the ceasefire.

Dr. Kissinger: We need an assessment of what we have to do to put the GVN in the best position to deal with violations.

Mr. Packard: There's no difference between options 2 or 3. The percentages [VC controlled population] are 13 [option 3] vs. 12 [option 2] after six months and 18 [option 3] vs. 14 [option 2] after one year. The

figures, though, are not very precise. Option 3 is more practical. The one key element that it has is increased inspection. Option 2 is better for us, but I just don't think it is very practical. I come down on option 3, with modifications.

Dr. Kissinger: Does everyone agree that options 1 and 4 are not preferred?

All agreed.

The choice, then, between option 2 or 3 depends on the political context at the moment and the negotiations.

Mr. Sullivan: Option 2 would be so difficult to negotiate that I think we should focus on 3.

Mr. Johnson: Perhaps we can start out with option 2 and then go to 3 as a fall-back position.

Dr. Kissinger: I agree that option 2 is not very practical. Option 3 is more realistic. Even if the other side accepted the idea of sanctuaries, they could put them just a couple of miles outside Hue or Danang.

Mr. Packard: The difference between options 3 and 4 is the strength of the ICC. Our experience is that we would do better with a strong ICC.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Packard) Dave, we're talking about options 2 and 3.

Mr. Packard: I thought we were arguing about 3 and 4.

Dr. Kissinger: I guess we're agreed we should give priority to option 3. (to Dr. Smith) Wayne, if your group has the time, can it do some more work on 2?

Dr. Smith: Even if the other side agrees to sanctuaries, we have to decide where we want them to be.

Dr. Kissinger: Have we ever done a study on this? They surely won't put the sanctuaries where they will do us the most good.

Gen. Knowles: As a matter of fact, we will have the same problem with a ceasefire in place.

Dr. Kissinger: Let's assume we will negotiate a ceasefire in place. Has anyone ever studied what either side will do the month before the ceasefire takes effect to achieve the best position? Let's say the ceasefire will take effect April 30. If they grab Hue, for example, on April 20 and hold it for ten days, they will have it during the ceasefire. It's possible they could do that. Have we studied the actions a negotiation of the ceasefire would trigger?

Dr. Smith: No, we have assumed they would do the most they could.

Dr. Kissinger: If there had been a ceasefire after Tet, we would have been in a fix. It took quite a while to recapture Hue.

Gen. Knowles: It took us three weeks to get it back.

Dr. Kissinger: That's right.

Mr. Packard: I think it would be just as well if both sides were in agreed sanctuaries.

Mr. Sullivan: I hate to bring up something unpleasant, but in October, 1970, the President called for a ceasefire in place.⁶ We have been focusing on that.

Mr. Packard: The President has been known to change his mind once or twice.

Mr. Carver: A ceasefire is unlikely to be raised by the other side as a separate issue. It's much more likely to be raised as part of a total package.

Dr. Kissinger: Whatever work we will have done will then put us that much ahead of the game.

Mr. Carver: Yes. But for the moment, I think we've gone just about as far as we can.

Dr. Smith: Should we look at what the GVN can do?

Dr. Kissinger: Do we have a list?

Dr. Smith: Yes. An annex to the study shows what the police and other forces can do.

Dr. Kissinger: Looking at all of this in terms of what will help the GVN, we need a study of what actions would be triggered by the start of negotiations. We also need a study on the separate monitoring of military violations, as against infiltration violations. And we ought to see how we should address the political context of which the ceasefire is a part. (to Mr. Johnson) How would we do this?

Mr. Johnson: We have three elements here: (1) the settlement; (2) the disposition of the POW question, both theirs and ours; and (3) the ceasefire. These are the issues, and the ceasefire is only one element within them. Frankly, I have a hard time coming to grips with all three elements.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Sullivan) How would you deal with this, Bill?

Mr. Sullivan: We must make certain assumptions. Just as we use option 3 as a point of reference, we must take the most practical possibilities in the POW and settlement issues and build hypothetical models which we can then use as points of reference. When and if circumstances arise, we can have relevant points of reference to relate to.

Dr. Kissinger: That's a good idea.

Mr. Johnson: Bill's [Sullivan] group is, I think, the best group to do this [build hypothetical models on POW and settlement issues].

Dr. Kissinger: Does everybody agree that is what is needed?

All agreed.

⁶ See Document 46.

267. Editorial Note

On October 3, 1971, incumbent President Nguyen Van Thieu overwhelmingly won reelection as President of the Republic of Vietnam. In telegram 15933 from Saigon, October 5, the Embassy noted that voter turnout was 87.7 percent, and 78.7 percent of voters endorsed his continuation in office. The Embassy concluded, "Conduct of the election was as a rule mechanically correct," but added the following: "We doubt that Vietnamese will point with pride to October 3. (Even a Presidential aide appeared somewhat embarrassed by the overwhelming percentages.) Most will be glad it is over and relieved to turn their attention to other subjects." (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files, 1970–73, POL 14 VIET S)

On October 12, President Nixon sent Thieu a letter of congratulations. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 766, Presidential Correspondence—1969–1974, Vietnam President Thieu Correspondence, Part 2) Kissinger forwarded to the President a draft of this letter, which had been prepared by the NSC staff, under an October 11 covering memorandum recommending that he sign it. He also forwarded a draft prepared by the Department of State on October 2, which he stated was too pedantic and hortatory considering the concessions Thieu made during his meeting with Haig on September 23. (Ibid.) For a report on the September 23 meeting, see Document 268.

In telegram 16462 from Saigon, Ambassador Bunker reported that he had delivered the letter to Thieu and recommended that Thieu do the following: reach out to his former political opponents, particularly the Buddhists; reorganize his cabinet; implement the economic reforms recommended by the Nixon administration; organize a political party; appoint new, more competent ARVN division commanders; deal with corruption in South Vietnamese society, particularly war-profiteering by the ARVN leadership; hold more frequent press conferences; and possibly release some prominent political prisoners. Bunker indicated that Thieu seemed amenable to many of these initiatives and said he would address some in a speech to the National Assembly in the near future, but that he was still forming his thoughts on these points. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 872, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Vietnam Elections)

268. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, October 6, 1971.

SUBJECT

General Haig's Talk with President Thieu

As I have told you, General Haig's almost two hour long conversation with President Thieu was completely successful.² It served to reassure him of continued US support, to secure his approval of our new negotiating initiative designed to make that support possible, and to elicit his assurance that he would take major steps of reconciliation and anti-corruption after the October 3 election.

In light of the importance of this exchange you may wish to read the full transcript at Tab A.³ Following are the highlights.

Our Negotiating Initiative

President Thieu not only accepted the rationale for, and substance of, our new political proposal; he insisted that he himself would not be a candidate in the new Presidential election that would take place after a negotiated settlement.

General Haig explained both your determination to carry on US support in this terminal phase of our involvement and the corollary need for an impressive negotiating record to hold domestic opposition and restrictive legislation in check, especially in view of the recent political developments in South Vietnam. He outlined our ideas for our new initiative which would include:

—the elements already essentially agreed upon with the other side in Paris (fixed withdrawals, POW release, ceasefire, neutrality toward the political process, respect for the Geneva Accords, international supervision and guarantees);

—a political proposal that would feature a new Presidential election five months after a settlement run by a mixed commission (including the communists), and supervised by an international body.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 872, For the President's Files, Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Encore, September 1971–75 February 1972, President's Speech January 25, 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen." Nixon wrote at the top of the memorandum, "K—This man has great character and subtlety."

² Haig met with Thieu on September 23. See also Document 261.

³ Attached but not printed is a memorandum of conversation, September 23.

President Thieu would step down a month before the election, for which he could be a candidate, and the President of the Senate would run the interim government.

General Haig outlined the advantages of this proposal, including the strengthening of Thieu's and our position of reasonableness both in South Vietnam and the U.S. so that Vietnamization could be successfully carried out. He said the other side was likely to reject it, but it offered a face-saving formula for them if they were at all interested in a negotiated settlement. In addition, the negotiating process would allow you to make a two-month withdrawal projection in November that would keep off-balance both Hanoi and our domestic opposition.

President Thieu endorsed the initiative and went further to say that he would *not* be a candidate for reelection, just as he had already promised his people he would step down if peace could be made. General Haig said that we did not think Hanoi should have a veto over candidates, and Thieu replied that we could use his pledge of non-candidacy secretly with the other side to enhance the negotiability of the package. He was confident that in a fair election any sound nationalist would defeat the communists, and the government would be left in good hands.

GVN Measures After October 3

General Haig stressed the importance of President Thieu's moving right after the current election to strengthen his base in our two countries before the negotiating process bears fruit or is made public. He specifically pointed to the need for reconciliation with Thieu's non-communist opponents, such as permitting some of them to enter the new government. President Thieu suggested that some responsible Buddhist elements could be included and confirmed at the end of the meeting that he would take reconciliation steps.

General Haig also underlined the need for dramatic measures against corruption, both in new procedures and removal of personnel. Here too Thieu agreed to consider such steps, to be undertaken promptly after October 3.

U.S. Assistance and Cambodia

In response to General Haig's inquiry, President Thieu said he would again take preemptive steps in Eastern Cambodia to deflect new pressures against MR III. Early action there would permit reinforcement of MR I which he thought would be the critical area during the next dry season. He plans to assemble a new division and additional units for MR I, but pointed to manpower problems and the lagging behind of certain U.S. equipment deliveries. General Haig noted that we had been speeding up these deliveries and promised to check into this matter further.

President Thieu asked General Haig to urge Lon Nol to solve the problem caused by Cambodian revocation of automatic license to the ARVN for shallow cross-border operations which Thieu considers essential. General Haig said that he had been assured that this issue was being resolved at the Military Commanders' level and promised to raise it with Lon Nol the next day.

Military and Diplomatic Stalemate, October 11, 1971–January 26, 1972

269. Message From the United States to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam¹

Washington, October 11, 1971.

General Walters should hand over the draft statement of principles to the North Vietnamese.

He should then read the following oral message:

“At the September 13 meeting Minister Xuan Thuy stated that the U.S. side should review the various suggestions made by the North Vietnamese.² The North Vietnamese side has also said that it would be forthcoming if a generous proposal is made by the U.S. side. The U.S. believes that this new proposal goes to the limits of possible generosity and fully takes into account the North Vietnamese propositions. The U.S. hopes that the North Vietnamese response will reflect the same attitude.

“Dr. Kissinger is prepared to meet on November 1, 1971 with Mr. Le Duc Tho, or some other appropriate official from Hanoi, together with Minister Xuan Thuy. He will be prepared at that meeting also to take account of other points that have been discussed in previous meetings in this channel.

“In the interim it is expected that both sides will refrain from bringing pressures through public statements which can only serve to complicate the situation.

“The U.S. side is putting forward these new proposals as one last attempt to negotiate a just settlement before the end of 1971.”

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1039, Files for the President, Vietnam Negotiations, HAK II 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Handwritten at top of the page is, “For the October 4 Meeting, 10/11/71,” but Xuan Thuy was unavailable so Walters delivered it and the attached statement of principles to Vo Van Sung on October 11. Kissinger included the text of the eight-point proposal in *White House Years*, pp. 1489–1490. For an account of the North Vietnamese view of the proposal, see Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger Negotiations in Paris*, pp. 210–211.

² See Document 254.

Attachment—Draft Statement of Principles³

Washington, undated.

1. The United States agrees to the total withdrawal from South Vietnam of all U.S. forces and other foreign forces allied with the government of South Vietnam. This withdrawal will be carried out in the following manner:

—All American and allied forces, except for a small number of personnel needed for technical advice, logistics, and observance of the ceasefire mentioned in point 6, will be withdrawn by July 1, 1972, provided that this statement of principles is signed by December 1, 1971. The terminal date for these withdrawals will in no event be later than seven months after this statement of principles is signed.

—The remaining personnel, in turn, will be progressively withdrawn beginning one month before the Presidential election mentioned in point 3 and simultaneously with the resignations of the incumbent President and Vice President of South Vietnam also provided for in point 3. These withdrawals will be completed by the date of the Presidential election.

2. The release of all military men and innocent civilians captured throughout Indochina will be carried out in parallel with the troop withdrawals mentioned in point 1. Both sides will present a complete list of military men and innocent civilians held throughout Indochina on the day this statement of principles is signed. The release will begin on the same day as the troop withdrawals and will be completed by July 1, 1972, provided this statement is signed by December 1, 1971. The completion of this release will in no event be later than seven months after this statement is signed.

3. The following principles will govern the political future of South Vietnam:

The political future of South Vietnam will be left for the South Vietnamese people to decide for themselves, free from outside interference.

There will be a free and democratic Presidential election in South Vietnam within six months of the signature of the final agreement based on the principles in this statement. This election will be organized and run by an independent body representing all political forces in South Vietnam which will assume its responsibilities on the date of the final agreement. This body will, among other responsibilities, determine the qualification of candidates. All political forces in South Vietnam can participate in the election and present candidates. There will be international supervision of this election.

³ No classification marking.

One month before the Presidential election takes place, the incumbent President and Vice President of South Vietnam will resign. A caretaker Administration, headed by the Chairman of the Senate, will assume administrative responsibilities except for those pertaining to the election, which will remain with the independent election body.

The United States, for its part, declares that it:

—will support no candidate and will remain completely neutral in the election.

—will abide by the outcome of this election and any other political processes shaped by the South Vietnamese people themselves.

—is prepared to define its military and economic assistance relationship with any government that exists in South Vietnam.

Both sides agree that:

—South Vietnam, together with the other countries of Indochina, should adopt a foreign policy of neutrality.

—Reunification of Vietnam should be decided on the basis of discussions and agreements between North and South Vietnam without constraint and annexation from either party, and without foreign interference.

4. Both sides will respect the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Indochina and those of 1962 on Laos. There will be no foreign intervention in the Indochinese countries and the Indochinese peoples will be left to settle by themselves their own affairs.

5. The problems existing among the Indochinese countries will be settled by the Indochinese parties on the basis of mutual respect for independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in each other's affairs. Among the problems that will be settled is the implementation of the principle that all armed forces of the countries of Indochina must remain within their national frontiers.

6. There will be a general ceasefire throughout Indochina, to begin when the final agreement is signed. As part of the ceasefire, there will be no further infiltration of outside forces into any of the countries of Indochina.

7. There will be international supervision of the military aspects of this agreement including the ceasefire and its provisions, the release of prisoners of war and innocent civilians, and the withdrawal of outside forces from Indochina.

8. There will be an international guarantee for the fundamental national rights of the Indochinese peoples, the neutrality of all the countries in Indochina, and lasting peace in this region.

Both sides express their willingness to participate in an international conference for this and other appropriate purposes.

270. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, October 16, 1971.

SUBJECT

Sir Robert Thompson Reports on Southeast Asia

Sir Robert Thompson has forwarded a report on his recent trip through Southeast Asia.² A summary follows.

Cambodia. The FANK's recent clearing of Route Six to Kompong Thom was a great success.

—During the coming year, the FANK should expand the security of Route Six and also concentrate on clearing the major route from Phnom Penh south to the coast.

—It is essential that the Khmer maintain political cohesion and face up to economic problems. Provided that they operate within the limits of their capabilities and do not over-reach themselves, all should go well next year.³

South Vietnam. Although the uncontested election was unfortunate, the voter turnout was genuinely massive and President Thieu clearly has overwhelming popular as well as military support.

—There is nothing to worry about in the pacification program. Additional pressure should be exerted on the enemy's village guerrilla squads, and steps to achieve this are now underway.

—NVA capabilities will not be any greater next year than in 1971, and will probably be less.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 92, Vietnam Subject Files, Sir Robert Thompson (71). Secret; Eyes Only. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen." Negroonte forwarded it to Kissinger under an October 12 covering memorandum indicating the NSC staff had prepared it and recommending that he send it to Nixon. Haig signed it for Kissinger.

² Thompson sent the report in message 38625 from Saigon, October 8. Karamessines forwarded it to Kissinger under a covering memorandum of the same date. (Ibid.)

³ Kissinger sent Nixon an interim report on Thompson's visit to Cambodia in an October 4 memorandum. He noted that Thompson had warned Sirik Matak that since the enemy was not relenting, Cambodia should follow a conservative strategy that would not expose the FANK to serious reverses or casualties. Nixon wrote next to this, "K—Right, very important." According to Kissinger's summary, Thompson also recommended that Cambodia allow the ARVN to contend with the enemy divisions in the rubber plantation near Route 7, while the FANK focused on Phnom Penh and the main line of communication; continue its steady progress in pacification; and expand to a 250,000 man force. (Ibid.)

—You can safely accelerate U.S. withdrawals to the point where the U.S. force level will total about 50,000 by next June 30, and will consist primarily of tactical air, helicopter support, and servicing elements for military assistance. President Thieu, Thompson reports, was not alarmed by this view.

Comment. Sir Robert has promised to send a more detailed report on his talk with President Thieu. He also plans to visit the area again next February.

271. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, October 20, 1971.

MEMORANDUM FOR

The Under Secretary of State
The Deputy Secretary of Defense
The Director of Central Intelligence
The Administrator, Agency for International Development

SUBJECT

Security Assistance for Cambodia

The Senior Review Group at its meeting on October 18, 1971,² agreed that:

—The \$310 million FY 1972 economic and military assistance and \$20 million PL-480 in the President's budget request is essential to achieving U.S. objectives in Cambodia, and that a Cambodian force of 220,000 with training completed by January 1973 will be the basis for planning for FY 1972.

—The TCN logistic improvement program of approximately 52 personnel is approved. It will be implemented after informal consultations with the Congress to take place following completion of Congressional mark-up of the FY 1972 foreign assistance Authorization Bill.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-63, SRG Meetings, Cambodian MAP, 10/18/71. Top Secret. Copies were sent to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Under Secretary of the Treasury, and the Assistant Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

² The minutes of the SRG meeting are *ibid.*, Box H-112, SRG Minutes, Originals, 1971.

—The program to increase the training rate for Cambodians in Vietnam and to provide training facilities and trained instructors in Cambodia will be accelerated to the maximum extent possible.

—The MEDT may be increased by up to 12 positions in Cambodia to support the logistics and training programs.

The Senior Review Group also agreed that:

—DOD, in coordination with the Department of State, will prepare by October 27, 1971 an analysis of three alternative MAP programs for FY 1972 with funding of \$200 million, \$225 million and \$250 million indicating the differences in program composition and in effective FANK capability at the end of FY 1972.³ Implications of the alternatives for FANK capabilities and for MAP funding in FY 1973 will be specified. Alternatives for the speed of tactical air build-up should be clearly identified.

—AID in coordination with the Departments of State and Defense will prepare:

(a) By October 27, 1971, an analysis of the effects of diverting from the \$110 million AID programming base varying amounts from \$30 million, and \$60 million to MAP to complement the alternative FY 1972 MAP program assumptions of the DOD paper.

(b) By November 1, 1971, an analysis of the Cambodian economic situation, the stabilization program, and steps which need to be taken to strengthen the Cambodian economy. The effects of various postulated force levels, and various degrees of control over the contingencies and economically important LOCs, on the economic situation should be described.

—The VSSG Working Group will coordinate the development of a systematic information system to assess the degree of control of the countryside, and communist intentions and potential in the countryside.

All of the foregoing papers should be submitted by the dates indicated for consideration by the Senior Review Group.

Henry A. Kissinger⁴

³ Laird responded in an October 29 memorandum to Kissinger with an assessment for each funding level. The analysis concluded that \$225 million would have no impact in 1972, but would delay FANK expansion by a year; in FY 73, a 220,000-man force would cost \$240 million and a 256,000-man force would cost \$280 million. The \$200 million level would require a 35,000-man force reduction, elimination of all lead time procurement, and cancellation of logistics improvements, but the FANK would still be able to hold main population centers and water and land lines of communication. In FY 73, a 220,000-man force would cost \$250 million and a 256,000-man force would cost \$300 million. The best option for FYs 72 and 73 was \$250 million, which was Laird's recommended level. (*Ibid.*, Box 513, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. XIV)

⁴ Haig signed for Kissinger above Kissinger's typed signature.

272. Editorial Note

On October 25, 1971, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam responded to the message and statement of principles delivered on October 11 (Document 269). According to a message from General Vernon Walters, Senior Military Attaché at the Embassy in Paris, he met with Vo Van Sung, the Delegate General at the North Vietnamese Embassy in Paris, 9:30 a.m. that morning at their usual rendezvous spot—73 Rue Jules Lagaisse—and Vo read him the following message, which Walters later translated from French into English:

“Today I am authorized to give you the reply to the proposal dated 11 October 1971 of the American government relative to a private meeting on 1 November 1971 between Special Adviser Kissinger on the one hand and Special Adviser Le Duc Tho and Minister Xuan Thuy on the other. Special Adviser Le Duc Tho and Minister Xuan Thuy are agreeable to meeting with Special Adviser Dr. Kissinger privately at the usual address at 1000 on 20 November 1971. This date has been chosen because Special Adviser Le Duc Tho has at the present time activities under way in Hanoi and furthermore Minister Xuan Thuy is still under medical treatment.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1039, Files for the President, Vietnam Negotiations, HAK II 1971)

In his memoirs, Kissinger recalled that the North Vietnamese replied “with customary arrogance, only six days before the date suggested for the meeting. There was no expression of goodwill, no comment on our proposal, no reference to an eagerness to settle in any particular time frame.” (*Ending the Vietnam War*, page 228)

The Nixon administration replied as follows: “Dr. Kissinger agrees to a private meeting with Special Adviser Le Duc Tho and Minister Xuan Thuy on November 20, 1971 at 11:30 at the usual address. He will be accompanied by Messrs. Walters, Lord and Negrofonte. The U.S. side assumes that the other side will make no public negotiating proposals before this meeting takes place. For its part the U.S. side will not make any such proposals.” A handwritten note on the U.S. reply indicates that it was delivered orally on November 3. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1039, Files for the President, Vietnam Negotiations, HAK II 1971)

In a backchannel message on November 13, Kissinger informed Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker in Saigon about the upcoming meeting and the fact that he would not use an intermediary to pass the eight-point proposal to the North Vietnamese. Kissinger also told Bunker that he would not inform the North Vietnamese of Thieu’s offer in his conversation with Haig on September 23 not to run for office in new elections after a peace agreement was reached to forestall the possibil-

ity that Thieu would change his mind. He instructed Bunker to inform Thieu of these details at his discretion. (Ibid., For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Encore Sept. 71–15 Feb. 72, President's Speech January 25, 1972)

Bunker replied to Kissinger in backchannel message 96 from Saigon, November 17, that he had reported on the situation to Thieu who responded that it was worthwhile to continue pursuing some type of agreement, but he was not sanguine about the prospects for the meeting. He stated that because of the United Nations decision on October 25 to admit the People's Republic of China and the upcoming visit of President Nixon in February 1972, Hanoi's "'stubbornness' might appear to increase while they utilized the time to build up resources and morale which had both suffered in recent months." He also believed that the Soviet Union, in an effort to counter China's recent diplomatic successes, might encourage the North Vietnamese to continue fighting by promising them additional aid. Thieu asked Bunker whether the United States would consider asking the French to put some pressure on Hanoi to reach an agreement. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 854, Sensitive Camp David, Vol. XIII)

According to a November 17 memorandum for the record by General Walters, Vo Van Sung had called him the day before to set up a meeting at 9:30 a.m. at their usual location. After some tea and small talk, Vo read the following message:

"At our last meeting I told you that Minister Xuan Thuy and Special Adviser Le Duc Tho were disposed to meet with Dr. Kissinger on 20 November. Today we have the regret to inform you that Special Adviser Le Duc Tho has suddenly become ill and will not be able to take part in this meeting. Minister Xuan Thuy is still agreeable to meeting with Special Adviser Henry Kissinger on 20 November at 11:30 as agreed."

Walters wrote that Vo had no idea what type of illness Le Duc Tho had and did not know who else would be able to represent him at a meeting. Vo informed him that Xuan Thuy was still ill as well and that his doctors would not allow him to resume his full duties. (Ibid., Box 1039, Files for the President, Vietnam Negotiations, HAK II 1971) For the North Vietnamese account of this exchange and Le Duc Tho's "political illness," see Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger Negotiations in Paris*, pages 211–212.

The Nixon administration responded to the cancellation of the meeting on November 19 with a brief note summarizing the recent exchange between the two sides following the October 11 U.S. proposal and noting that while the United States regretted Le Duc Tho's illness "under these circumstances, no point would be served by a meeting." The note continued: "The U.S. side stands ready to meet with Special

Adviser Le Duc Tho, or any other representative of the North Vietnamese political leadership, together with Xuan Thuy, in order to bring a rapid end to the war on a basis just for all parties. It will wait to hear recommendations from the North Vietnamese for a suitable date.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 861, Camp David Memos, July–Dec 1971)

Kissinger also instructed General Walters to pass a similar message to Huang Chen, Ambassador to France of the People’s Republic of China, on November 20, with the following additional message addressed to Chou En-lai:

“As I told you and Vice Chairman Yeh Chien-ying, and as we have made clear to the North Vietnamese, the United States is prepared to treat North Vietnamese concerns with generosity. At the same time, the People’s Republic of China, as a great country, will recognize that we cannot permit ourselves to be humiliated, no matter what the possible consequences for other policies. We know that the People’s Republic, like the United States, does not trade in principles. We have no specific request to make, and we do not expect an answer to this communication.”

The message to the PRC and the Memorandum for the Record by Walters, November 20, are *ibid.*, Box 849, For the President’s Files, China Exchanges/Vietnam Negotiations, China Exchanges, October 20, 1971. See also *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume E–13, Documents on China, 1969–1972, Document 63.

273. Conversation Among President Nixon, Secretary of State Rogers, and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, November 2, 1971.

[Omitted here is discussion of the U.S. foreign aid program and South Asia.]

Nixon: We just got word that Le Duc Tho is coming back to Paris on the 20th to meet with him on Sunday.²

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 611–03. No classification marking. The transcript was prepared by the editors specifically for this volume. This exchange is part of a larger conversation from 9:32 to 10:45 a.m.

² November 21.

Kissinger: That's [unclear].

Nixon: Huh?

Kissinger: [unclear]

Nixon: Now, in my view, this is either fish or cut bait. There isn't any more reason to meet again. On the other hand, the—you know, you know the pattern of the previous meetings, and how much we have offered. We've answered the seven points, and they've agreed to some things, and so forth and so on.

Kissinger: Bill has seen every memo—³

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —that I've given you.

Nixon: Yeah. What is the situation at the present time? Le Duc Tho—

Kissinger: Well, [unclear]—

Nixon: —wants this meeting, though. What I'm getting at is this meeting assumes more importance due to the fact. Remember, I said, "No more meetings unless they have a direct expectation to discuss something new."

Kissinger: Well, they—they sent us a message,⁴ which said that. We left it the last time, as you'll remember, Bill, that if I decide there's nothing to say, we'll meet again—

Rogers: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —but—that if you'll schedule a meeting. Well, we got a message—actually, we got it while I was in China—while in Paris; we didn't hear it in China—which said that Le Duc Tho is coming back to Paris, and Xuan Thuy and Le Duc Tho would like to meet me on November 20th. We got it four weeks ahead of time. In other words, we got it the last week of October. They added to it that the reason they're suggesting November 20th is because Xuan Thuy is ill and recuperating. And you remember, they've given us that message also in the official—

Nixon: Hmm.

Kissinger: Normally, they don't give any explanation for their movement. And—

Nixon: Yeah, that's public knowledge.

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: The Xuan Thuy part is [unclear]—

³ For example, Kissinger sent Rogers a slightly revised version of the record of his secret talks in Paris on September 13 with Le Duc Tho in a memorandum of September 14. See footnote 8, Document 254.

⁴ On October 25; see Document 272.

Kissinger: Yeah, but normally when Xuan Thuy doesn't come to a meeting—

Nixon: Le Duc Tho is not public knowledge?

Kissinger: That's right. Well, but—

Nixon: Yeah. Then he's coming back.

Kissinger: That he's coming—

Nixon: He will be—

Kissinger: He will be coming back. So, now, 15, 16, 17th—if he's coming—through the 20th, he'll be in Paris, and that's [unclear]—

Nixon: The most important point is that this is—

Kissinger: That he's asked for a meeting in a public venue.

Nixon: Yeah. Now, the most important point is that, then, the—we know, we've always said that there will come a time when the negotiating track is either closed, or it could really mean something. It could mean something this time. It could. I—I don't know. But, it—the point is, it's at their initiative this time; they want to meet. Now, this occurred, of course, before this damn vote.⁵ I don't know how much effect this will have [unclear]. But, if we can get a continuing resolution through before that meeting, it would be very helpful. You see? Well, as a matter of fact, continuing resolutions have to go through—

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: —the 15th.

Kissinger: It's got to go through with—⁶

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: I think we really need the heat on that [unclear]. Now, this comes back to the point about the, about the troop withdrawal that—which—we got Laird on it; Laird's set up for it, but no idea that I've—here's what I had in mind, and, see if [unclear]. I think that we cannot make a—what I would call, and you know—I felt that there has to come a time when we make a—[unclear] you—we talk about a proposal, we may make an announcement:⁷ “Well, this is it. We have fin-

⁵ On October 29, the Senate rejected a House bill, HR 9910, authorizing both economic and military foreign aid in fiscal years 1973 and 1974 at \$3.4 billion. This was the first outright rejection of foreign aid assistance since the inception of the program 24 years before. Complicating the issue was an amendment by Senator Mike Mansfield calling for withdrawal of U.S. troops in Indochina within six months after passage of the legislation. (*Congress and the Nation*, 1969–1972, Vol. II, pp. 876–877)

⁶ On December 16, the House rejected the Mansfield amendment, and Mansfield accepted this vote as an expression of the House. A House–Senate conference agreed upon a continuing resolution that would fund foreign aid at \$2.75 billion. (*Ibid.*, pp. 877–878)

⁷ The announcement of the withdrawal of 45,000 U.S. troops from Vietnam was made on November 12; see footnote 2, Document 276.

ished, and now— And the war is—it’s completed, now.” I was hoping we could do it now. We can, in the light of this meeting. We can. Before the meeting,⁸ you say, “Regardless of what happens, on the negotiating front, we’re going to do this, or that, and the other thing.” Well then, on the other hand, we have to say something. Here’s what I have in mind.

[Omitted here is discussion of Nixon’s public announcement of troop withdrawals.]

⁸ Apparent reference to a meeting of the President with the Republican House Congressional leadership to discuss the legislative program for the remainder of 1971, 5:25 to 6:22 p. m. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President’s Daily Diary)

274. Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, November 1971.

SUBJECT

My October China Visit: Discussions of the Issues

[Omitted here is material unrelated to Indochina and Vietnam.]

Indochina

Our discussions on the afternoon of October 21² on this subject were generally similar to those we held in July.

I underscored the reasonableness of our approach, pointing out that our negotiating proposals had addressed every concern of their allies. I stressed the advantages to the PRC of an Indochina settlement, on the one hand, and the risks of continued conflict on the other hand. Against this backdrop I made a somewhat more emphatic pitch than July for Chinese help with Hanoi, while still making it clear that we would not embarrass Peking. Chou, in turn, emphasized the desir-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1035, Files for the President, China Materials, China, HAK’s October 1971 Visit. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for information. The memorandum is unsigned and no specific date is indicated. It is printed in full in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XVII, China, 1969–1972, Document 164.

² The memorandum of conversation between Kissinger and Zhou Enlai is *ibid.*, Document 162.

ability of our setting final withdrawals before your visit (without insisting on a political solution). He reiterated that peace had to be made with Hanoi directly, but explicitly hoped that negotiations would succeed. As in July, he was obviously uninformed about the details of our negotiations with the North Vietnamese.

Chou led off the session by citing Indochina as an urgent issue and the need for final U.S. withdrawals. He asked why we had not accepted, or at least replied to, Mme. Binh's seven points. He then explained that they could not accept Ambassador Bruce in Peking while a war was still going on.³ I interjected that we understood this, but given the trust he had in the White House we hoped that the PRC would find him acceptable after the war.

Chou continued that our not setting a date for final withdrawal could prevent your visit to China from being as successful as otherwise, although he made clear that this was not a condition. He repeated the PRC's support for the seven points and said that final decisions on a settlement rested with Hanoi, not Peking. He then inquired why we had not set a final date and said that this was more urgent than the UN question or the normalization of Sino-US relations.

Telling the Prime Minister that he had been misinformed about the negotiations, I proceeded to give him a fairly detailed rundown of our negotiating efforts over the summer, including the outlines of our most recent proposal of October 11.⁴ I did not give him either a piece of paper or all the details on our proposal, but enough to show its forthcoming nature. I pointed out how we had met all of the concerns of the North Vietnamese and the PRG, even to the point of using some of their formulations. We had addressed ourselves primarily to the North Vietnamese nine point proposal, which, according to Hanoi, superseded the PRG seven points. I told Chou that it was tempting for us to publish our negotiating proposals since this would dominate public opinion in our country, but that we preferred to try and reach a settlement. I then sought Chinese influence in Hanoi with the following arguments:

—We understood that Peking didn't want to interfere in the negotiating process. But we questioned whether one small country, obsessed with its suffering and conflict, could be permitted to thwart every sign of progress between the U.S. and Peking because its suspicions were so great that it would not make a negotiated settlement.

³ During his July trip to Beijing, Kissinger asked Zhou Enlai if Bruce could accompany him to China during the October visit. Zhou agreed, but Ambassador Huang informed Kissinger in Paris later in July that Bruce would not be welcome in China. See *ibid.*, Documents 143 and 151. See also *White House Years*, p. 769.

⁴ See Document 269.

—Why would we want bases in one corner of Asia when the whole trend was toward a new relationship with Asia's most important country?

—If Hanoi showed Peking's largeness of spirit we could settle the war within days.

—We wanted the independence of North Vietnam and the other countries of Southeast Asia. Perhaps there were others (i.e., the Soviet Union) who might wish to use Hanoi to create a bloc against China.

—We had made our last offer and we could not go further. We knew the PRC did not trade in principles, but the proposals we had made would end the war on a basis that would not require it to do so.

Chou then asked a series of questions about our withdrawals, the new elections, and the ceasefire. He frankly admitted, as he had in July, that he had not heard a word about these negotiating proposals. He asked whether we had sent a message with Podgorny to Hanoi. When I said that we had not, Chou laughed contemptuously about Russian diplomatic efforts, including their extensive travels since the July announcement. He indicated privately that Moscow had made unspecified proposals in Hanoi which Hanoi had rejected.⁵

Chou said that our withdrawal would be a "glorious act" for us, and I responded that we had to find someone with whom to negotiate. We would withdraw in any event: the only question was whether it would be slowly through our unilateral policy or more quickly as a result of negotiations.

Chou made a distinction between Vietnamese and Indochina-wide ceasefires. He expressed concern that an Indochina ceasefire would freeze the political situation in the entire region (his main problem being Sihanouk's status, of course). I said that we would not interfere with whatever governments evolved as a result of the ceasefire. We then had a testy exchange on Cambodia where I pointed out that there would not be any need to arrange a ceasefire if North Vietnamese troops would withdraw and let the local forces determine their own future. Chou did not deny their presence; he said that they were there in sympathy for their South Vietnamese compatriots. In order to explain Hanoi's suspiciousness, he recalled the "deception" of 1954 when the North Vietnamese had been tricked and no election had been held. Getting quite excited, he termed this a "dirty act", launching into Dulles. I replied that the guarantee for our actions in a peace settle-

⁵ On October 30, Kissinger met Dobrynin and discussed, among other things, prospects for peace in Vietnam and the role of the Chinese and Soviets in the potential settlement. See *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 8.

ment lay not in clauses but in the difference in our world outlook compared to the Dulles policy of the 1950s.

I again pointed out the generosity of our proposals and the temptation to go public with them. Chou said that he could not comment on our offer since he did not know about it in detail. (Later I said that I was not giving him our detailed proposal since that was up to the PRC's ally to do. Chou agreed. In a later meeting Chou did acknowledge that our political proposal represented a new element.) He maintained that Hanoi's preoccupation and suspicion were understandable for a small, deceived country. The North Vietnamese could not be expected to have a large view like the Chinese. (Marshal Yeh on another occasion told me that Hanoi was too proud; having, as it thinks, defeated the world's largest military power, Hanoi was very reluctant to take advice. In this it was egged on by Moscow. Peking, according to Yeh, genuinely wanted peace, but it did not want to make it easier for Moscow to pursue its policy of encircling China by creating a pro-Moscow bloc in Indochina.)

In any event, Chou said, the settlement was up to us and Hanoi. He again emphasized that it was important to have this problem essentially settled before you came to China.

I then summed up:

—I had made seven secret trips this year to Paris which was not the activity of a government seeking to prolong the war;

—We were no long-term threat to the independence of Vietnam and wanted to make peace;

—We recognized the limits to what the PRC could do and the complications of the Soviet role, but nevertheless if the opportunity presented itself, we would appreciate Peking's telling its friends its estimate of the degree of our sincerity in making a just peace.

—We could not go any further than our proposals of October 11.

Chou again commented that they hoped we could settle and get out, whereas the Soviet Union wished to pin us down. He said it would be impossible not to mention Vietnam in the communiqué if the war had not been settled. I rejoined that there should be no misapprehension that Vietnam was an extremely sensitive issue for us and that it was impossible to accept a communiqué that was critical of us. When Chou asked why we had not made a public pledge of final withdrawals, I said this would gain us two to three months of favorable headlines, but we were interested in making a settlement rather than empty propaganda victories.

Chou concluded by again wishing us well in negotiations, calling Indochina the most urgent problem with regard to the relaxation of tension in the Far East, and saying that U.S. withdrawal would be a

glorious act. I closed with the hope that he understood what we were trying to do even though we recognized that the PRC had to support its allies. When I said that the Prime Minister should teach his method of operation to his allies, he commented that the styles of various countries differed and that they couldn't impose their will on their friends.

In a subsequent session where Chou was bearing down on the issue of foreign troops, I pointed to the Chinese forces in Laos. He said that these were ordinary workers plus antiaircraft forces needed to protect them. If peace came, the latter could be withdrawn "in a day's time." In any event these personnel were building the road at the request of the "neutralists" and would all leave when the job was done.

In our last meeting Chou made the rather remarkable comment that he believed we "genuinely want a peaceful settlement."

Hopefully this issue will have been transformed by the time you go to Peking. We cannot expect Peking to lean hard on its friends. We can expect it to help tip the balance for a negotiated settlement if the other objective realities move Hanoi toward a bargain. If so, Peking will have incentives to encourage North Vietnamese compliance. On the other hand, if the conflict continues, Peking (and Moscow) will not want to see a major offensive—and our reaction—shadowing the summit. Thus the situation on the ground, and our declining role should provide a relatively quiet setting. And the communiqué draft has Peking backing its friends in inoffensive language while we emphasize a negotiated settlement.⁶

⁶ The draft joint communiqué is *ibid.*, volume XVII, China, 1969–1972, Document 145, Tab A. The final text of the Shanghai Communiqué, issued on February 27, 1972, at the end of President Nixon's visit to China, is printed *ibid.*, Document 203, and in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1972*, pp. 372–379.

275. **Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon**¹

Washington, November 8, 1971.

SUBJECT

Trip to Vietnam, November 2–8, 1971

As you requested, Admiral Moorer and I have reviewed again in the theater the situation in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. The visit afforded me the opportunity to visit with Ambassador Bunker and his staff, General Abrams and his staff, and President Thieu² and the top Republic of Vietnam (RVN) leadership. In addition, members of my personal staff spent time in the field throughout South Vietnam. They visited the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) in each Military Region; consulted U.S. military and civilian leaders in the various regions; met with those who are planning and administering the economic programs; and went into detail with those who are charged with the diverse and complicated prisoner of war matters. As you know, Admiral Moorer spent additional time in Cambodia and Laos. He will be providing supplementary observations later.

In this report, I shall, as I have after my three previous Southeast Asia trips, provide some general impressions. Thereafter, I shall provide in somewhat more detail:

- A delineation of the impressions we took to Southeast Asia.
- What we found in Vietnam.
- The outlook for the future, based on our earlier analyses and our findings in Vietnam.
- The current issues which deserve special attention.

Finally, I will draw the conclusions which seem, in my judgment, most pertinent and will make recommendations based on those conclusions.

General Impressions

The most compelling impression I have is one of success. The risks you have taken for peace are paying off. The successes, and the potential for future success, are of such magnitude that we must, if anything, guard against overoptimism.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 158, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Nov–Dec 71. Secret; Sensitive.

² A memorandum of conversation between Laird and Thieu on November 5 is *ibid.*

In the various functional areas—military, pacification, economic, and political—progress is significant, if not completely uniform. In the political field, there is cause for concern. That concern stems principally from indications that President Thieu may move too slowly and unimaginatively to avail himself of steps that are needed to maintain stability and cohesion in the RVN society. Opportunities lost today may not be retrievable in the months and years ahead. The cost of losing these opportunities could seriously degrade the impressive progress made—and potentially available—in the other functional areas.

The fact that President Thieu is not showing immediate signs of using the referendum mandate to move ahead vigorously in the political arena does not diminish the fact that currently effective military, province, district, and local leadership is at work. I was particularly pleased with that progress. RVN's will and desire are more in evidence today than at any time in the past. That continues to be an essential—if not the essential—ingredient to the future. President Thieu agreed with me on that point.

I believe one major reason for this change is that from the outset of your Administration the focus has been on turning over responsibilities to the RVN and not taking them over as had been the case prior to that time.

The view of U.S. civilian and military leaders in Vietnam and of the GVN leadership is that we now have and can maintain sufficient military strength to preclude the enemy from achieving any kind of military verdict in South Vietnam. A dynamism is at work leading to increased RVN self-reliance. The United States can continue its force redeployments. In fact, the redeployments can safely be accelerated.

There are, of course, continuing problem areas. In addition to the political item mentioned previously, I see little progress in (a) the formulation of new diplomatic initiatives for peace; (b) the planning for or resolution of the complex and important prisoner of war issues; and (c) the various forms of regional cooperation, fostered by the Southeast Asian nations, which will allow them to consolidate their hard-won gains.

The U.S. military leadership in Vietnam again deserves special mention. General Abrams, General Weyand, General Lavelle, and their staffs are pursuing U.S. interests with a vigor and resolution worthy of the highest acclaim. We can be justly proud of the U.S. military elements in Vietnam.

Those, in brief, are my general reactions. I should like to outline in more detail the impressions I carried to Vietnam and how they compared with what I found there.

[Omitted here is the body of the report.]

276. **Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)**¹

Washington, November 13, 1971, 10:38 a.m.

K: Mr. President.

P: Henry, how did you get along at the Ford Theater last night?

K: It was very nice.

P: Julie said she saw you. She said most of the jokes were on our side.

K: They were very friendly. Of course, Bob Hope was making the jokes. Even the others—which weren't against us—were sort of loving jokes. I thought your announcement . . .²

P: I was going to ask you about that. How did it go?

K: Mr. President, it could not have been better. I read in the newspapers and on TV . . .

P: It has confused the hell out of them, hasn't it?

K: Murray Marder wrote a perceptive piece. He said—do you want me to get it?

P: Yes. We haven't gotten the *Post* up here yet.

K: [read excerpts from the Marder column to the President]³

P: Good. And in the *Times*—which is far more important—had a chart which showed it going up and then going way down. Now the thing that is interesting to me is the two-month thing has another advantage. Making more announcements keeps reminding people that the other side got us in and we are getting out. Remember, Acheson wasn't so dumb—he said keep telling them.

K: I think it worked beautifully.

P: Certainly from the standpoint, it worked beautifully. I think we have really put it to the North Vietnamese now. I think one thing we did get in was when I said, in the two-month period . . .

K: . . . was the rate of infiltration.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 12. No classification marking.

² At a press conference on November 12, the President announced that he was withdrawing 45,000 U.S. troops from Vietnam over the next 2 months and would make a subsequent withdrawal statement some time in February 1972. The text of the press conference is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1971*, pp. 1101–1109.

³ Brackets are in the original.

P: That puts it right to them. If the infiltration comes up, we will watch it. We will bomb them or change the rate of withdrawal.

K: Marder also points that out.

P: He does?

K: In addition to the impact on negotiations, it has an impact on your public image. Even on this, where we are set in our course, you have done the unexpected once again. You have never done the conventional in any announcement. You have done it in a complex way which enhances the image of you as a thoughtful man with long-range plans. That also helps among the sophisticates. It gives some confidence to the people. I spoke last evening to the Executive Vice President of NBC, Herb Schlosser, who is in charge of all programming and who actually had been on our side all along. He said Vietnam now, even among his rabid friends, is a moot point. They all think you know what you are doing.

P: Good.

K: And Mel Laird—I saw him last night. He said, “God damn it; he screwed me again.” But he said it was a good move.

P: He thought he would out-guess us, and didn’t make it. The best thing was to go to 45,000.

K: That’s right.

P: Now he can’t squeal about a thing.

K: We have intercepts that Hanoi is assessing its military situation pretty poorly. We have negotiations about as well set as we can.

[Omitted here is discussion of India and Pakistan.]

277. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, November 18, 1971, 8:30 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Ambassador Anatoliy F. Dobrynin
Henry A. Kissinger

The dinner lasted three and a half hours. It was marked by great cordiality.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

Vietnam

Dobrynin then wanted to return to the Middle East, but I interrupted him to tell him that I wanted to discuss Vietnam. I began by reciting the events that had led to the Vietnamese cancellation of the meeting, adding to it my conversation on September 29 with the Soviet Foreign Minister.² (See note to North Vietnamese at Tab A!)³ I said I wanted to make it absolutely clear that we were reaching the end of our patience. If present methods continued, we would have to reserve the right to take whatever action was necessary. We would not tolerate the humiliation of the President, and if the North Vietnamese thought that they could bring about a military solution, they would confront the most violent opposition from the United States. In fact, I wanted the Soviet leaders to be aware that we reserved the right to take strong action to bring about the release of our prisoners in any event.

Dobrynin said he was very surprised. He could understand, of course, that we would react strongly to an attack. This would not be approved in Moscow, but it would be understood. But we had always said that we would end the war either through negotiation or through Vietnamization. Had we lost faith in Vietnamization? If we escalated the war without provocation by the other side, then the reaction in Moscow might be very serious, and Moscow might have to take certain preparatory steps in any event to make clear its position in advance.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 492, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1971, Vol. 8. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting took place at the Soviet Embassy. Kissinger forwarded a copy of the memorandum to Nixon on November 26 along with a summary of the conversation. (Ibid.) The full text of the memorandum of conversation is in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 13.

² The meeting was on September 30; see Document 263.

³ Tab A is a copy of the note sent to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in Paris on November 19; see Document 272.

I said that I wanted to sum up our views. If there were a North Vietnamese attack, then we would respond without restraint. If there were no North Vietnamese attack, then we nevertheless reserved freedom of action. If we went substantially beyond the existing framework on such matters, e.g. operations approaching Laos and Cambodia, the Soviets would have some advance indication that methods like this were being considered.⁴

Dobrynin then asked whether I was disappointed in the Chinese efforts to end the Vietnamese war. I said that I had never expected any significant Chinese effort to end the Vietnamese war, and therefore I was not. Dobrynin said that he knew that Hanoi had brought Peking back into line by threatening a public attack on Peking's policies and by taking its case to the Communist Parties around the world, on the ground that Peking was betraying their revolution. I said there was no cause for it because we had never expected Peking to intervene directly in the negotiating process.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

⁴ Kissinger also delivered a note to Soviet Minister Counselor Yuli M. Vorontsov, who was acting for Ambassador Dobrynin who was on leave in the Soviet Union, on December 2 at 6 p.m., expressing Nixon's "extreme disappointment about the Soviet actions on Vietnam." The note warned if the Democratic Republic of Vietnam sought to rely on a military solution, "the President wishes to leave no doubt that he is prepared to take appropriate measures regardless of the impact on other policies. If the road to a negotiated settlement is closed, the President will reconsider the advisability of continuing the private Paris talks. It goes without saying that in this channel the U.S. is not interested in pro forma talks but in serious negotiations by qualified representatives at the highest level to bring about a rapid and just solution of the war." The full text of the note, which also discusses the Middle East, is printed in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 16.

278. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, November 20, 1971.

[Omitted here is discussion of Secretary Rogers' forthcoming trip to Latin America, the President's schedule, and the international monetary situation.]

Kissinger: Then, I gave them a personal note from me to Chou En-lai, so that you—about events with the North Vietnamese.²

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: As—and I just recounted when we had made a proposal, when they had agreed to it, that then they cancelled it. Their Ambassador said, "What? They cancelled it three days before the meeting?" And he—

Nixon: Bill Walters there?

Kissinger: Yeah, and Walters said, "Yes." He said, "That's impossible," but that's not an official comment. And that's amazing. And—

Nixon: Well, Xuan Thuy's not sick. Do you think he's sick?

Kissinger: No, no. He's in—he's in Peking with Pham Van Dong.

Nixon: So he wasn't sick the last time—?

Kissinger: No. Now, Haig believes that the Chinese—that they are up there because the Chinese are going to try to make them settle. I'm not that sure. I'm not sure about that.

Nixon: [unclear] the Chinese even talk to them?

Kissinger: No, no. The Chinese are talking. They're up there now.

Nixon: It's right there, I know.

[Omitted here is discussion of Nixon's forthcoming trip to China.]

Nixon: What I had in mind, Henry is—and I think it fits in, in any event—I'd like to get, first, that major—I'm considering summoning Moorer over here—if it doesn't cost too much—that major movement of the fleet, and an alert, and all that sort of thing, that we did at one other previous time—

Kissinger: Absolutely.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 621–18. No classification marking. The transcript was prepared by the editors specifically for this volume. This exchange was part of a larger conversation from 8:45 to 10:45 a.m.

² See Document 272.

Nixon: —and the mining exercise, having it ready. And now, it'll be useful to have those carriers up there, anyway, for the purpose of this three-day bombing run—³

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: —that we're going to do if these bastards don't do it. But, if we can get those ships moving now, and also get out something with regard to mining or—I don't know whether that's too far, or if it takes too long or not. Second, I want you to get Helms, and get ahold of him with regard to massive CIA harassment during the period of this two-to-three-day deal. Now, by that, I mean everything he can. Third, I think we need a propaganda thing, with regard to broadcasts, and all that sort of thing. In other words, build it up like we did Son Tay.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: Now, if we're going to do this—in other words, if we have to go hard—or what it basically is: being hard, Henry—let's do it in a clever way this time, in a coordinated approach. If you can think of anything else?

Kissinger: I think this is excellent. I think—

Nixon: How does that sound to you as a plan?

Kissinger: I think it's outstanding. And I think that we ought to begin the fleet movement. We shouldn't do it while Pham Van Dong is in Peking. Let's say—

Nixon: No, I think you could move now, because the fleet, the fleet—

Kissinger: Ok, we'll start it, then—

Nixon: You see, the fleet has to—it takes time for it to move. We know those bastards. The time in Korea we had a hell of a time—

Kissinger: That—there's a long distance. I think they can be there in four days.

³ Nixon is referring to a JCS plan, Operation Proud Deep Alpha, that was formally submitted to him by Laird on December 9. The operation would target air strikes against four North Vietnamese airfields south of 20 degrees North latitude; air strikes against air defense, logistics, and military targets south of 18 degrees North latitude; and initially include covert night South Vietnamese patrol boat operations against logistics and port facilities in the Panhandle of North Vietnam. In submitting the proposal, Laird endorsed the general concept, but wanted to limit the operations to two days and exclude the patrol boat operation. (Memorandum from Laird to Nixon, December 9, attached to a summary memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, undated; *ibid.*, NSC Files, Box 123, Vietnam Subject Files, 35617) The air operations ran from December 26 to 30, but initial results were adversely affected by poor weather conditions. As the operations continued, they were more successful. (Chronology; Ford Library, Laird Papers, Box 27, Vietnam, Vol. XII)

Nixon: Now listen: they can make movements that are not going to be noted. Well, I want them there so that—

Kissinger: [unclear]

Nixon: You get my point?

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: I think it might be well that they—

Kissinger: Well, they will be—

Nixon: —that they know that they're moving while he's there.⁴

Kissinger: All right.

Nixon: If you don't hit 'em, what difference does it make? Maybe, just [unclear]. I don't know. [unclear]

Kissinger: Well, what I would like to avoid is for Zhou Enlai to be confronted with a request by Pham Van Dong of a new threat. Because I thought—in the message I sent to Zhou—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —I put in a threat, already.⁵

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: But, we can start immediately on the fleet movement, and then keep building it—

Nixon: Well, yeah. Now, one other thought occurred to me: We have more of a card than we think regarding settlement. We have always assumed—I mean, you've just assumed, and I have, too—that these fellows would not want to risk my being re-elected. I'm sure it must have occurred to you, Henry, that regardless of how the election comes out in November, I will still be President until January 20th, and I'll be Commander-in-Chief. And, if I should have lost, I would certainly, certainly, not go out with my tail between my legs. Now, if those prisoners are not back by the time of the election, if we should lose the election, the day after that election—win, lose, or draw—we will bomb the bejeezus out of them. Because then, to hell with history. To hell with history—

Kissinger: History will think well of you, then.

Nixon: You see my point?

Kissinger: Yes.

Nixon: Then I'll say, "All right, my predecessor—my successor isn't going to be able to do it." But you can order—as Commander-in-

⁴ Pham Van Dong, who was in China.

⁵ Kissinger is referring to his discussion with Zhou Enlai in Beijing on Indochina; see Document 274.

Chief—say, “Now, in this case”—and then, I would really take it out. I’d take out the railroads; I’d take out the air force; I’d take out the—you know, just, just knock the shit out of ‘em for three months. Now—

Kissinger: That’s the best—I had not thought of that—

Nixon: You see what I mean?

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: Now, you have to seize it. Put that into a bargaining equation there.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: These guys haven’t got all that good a—haven’t got all that good a thing. Now, I—they’re right: to do anything before the election would pose problems, politically. But, do they realize that they have to deal with, here, a man, who if he wins the election will kick the shit out of them, and if he loses the election will do it even more? Now, there’s where we are. Did that ever occur to you?

Kissinger: I—I have to say, honestly, it did not.

Nixon: Now, some would say—

Kissinger: [unclear]

Nixon: Some would say, “Well, if you lost the election, the editorials will scream: ‘He doesn’t have a mandate,’” and so forth. Bullshit! I couldn’t care less. I could care, then, about seeing that America didn’t lose the war. And getting back our prisoners, which is even more important at that time. See? I’m telling you: we’ve got cards then, and we’d be ready. And they’d have to do what I said—I mean the [Joint] Chiefs—wouldn’t they?

Kissinger: The Chiefs have to, of course. And they’ll do it enthusiastically.

Nixon: But out of that intriguing idea—it occurred to me at 2:30 in the morning—

Kissinger: I think that if—

Nixon: —this morning I woke up, and I was thinking a little, and, you know, sometimes the best ideas come in. I thought: Why do we have to just think in terms of winning the election, or not? All right, we lose it. I think we’re gonna—we have a chance of winning it, and maybe there is a chance of losing it. I said, “By God, these guys are going to be playing—they’re playing with a tough situation here. I’m going to be here from November the 7th until January the 20th, come hell or high water, and that’s a hell of a good time to bomb, too.” That’s another thing: it’s good in terms of the weather then. Correct?

Kissinger: Uh—

Nixon: December and January aren’t bad?

Kissinger: With our bloody Air Force—no, no, they are—they're pretty good. Our damned Air Force, you never—

Nixon: I know—

Kissinger: I have yet to find a time when they think it's good—

Nixon: I'd get the Navy in. I'd get them in, and I'd say, "Boys, here's your chance to be heroes. I want you to knock out everything. These bastards have got your buddies up there, and they haven't turned them loose. Now punish them." And, incidentally, I wouldn't worry about a little slop over, and knock off a few villages and hamlets, and the rest. We've just got to do it—

Kissinger: Oh, under those conditions, I'd—

Nixon: This would be war. I'd take out—I wouldn't worry about a Soviet ship, you know, that was in Haiphong Harbor—

Kissinger: I think, Mr. President—

Nixon: You see my point?

Kissinger: And if you win the election, we, we should not make the mistake that we did the last time—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: —of wasting the first six months.

Nixon: Never. No, if we win the election, the day after, we say, "All right, we give you 30 days."

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: And then, if we don't get it in 30—I think 30 is an ultimatum. I'd lay down an ultimatum, just like it was done in the old days.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: We haven't done an ultimatum, yet, except through these silly little things with Tito and the rest. But I—this, this is an ultimatum. I'm sure you realize, you know, before, before China—before November 3rd, we laid down some ultimatums. Then the speech came, but we didn't come through on the ultimatums [unclear]. But, I want you to know, Henry: I meant exactly what I said. If those bastards do not come back with something, we are going to hit them for three or for days. [unclear] It isn't as much as I'd like, but we'll do at least that much. The only reason that I can't do more than that is that I don't want to go so far as to jeopardize the Chinese trip. The Russian trip will go on, I don't care what. The Chinese trip might be difficult.

Kissinger: I think it will go on, too.

[Omitted here is discussion of China.]

Nixon: But I just thought that idea would intrigue the hell out of you.

Kissinger: I think—

Nixon: Regardless of the election, we are going to give them a pop. Huh?

Kissinger: Well, with, with your permission, it's one that I intend to use—that I should use the next time I see the North Vietnamese—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —because I'll guarantee you, they'll—they're coming back to us.

Nixon: [unclear] And, and just say, "Now, gentlemen, regardless of how this election comes out, don't count on that. You remember that he was—this man is going to be President, and I have never seen a man more determined. He's made the decision. We're going to finish it off." And, I mean, I would. I really would. I'd finish off the goddamn place.

Kissinger: And they'll—

Nixon: Bomb Haiphong. You know, the whole thing. I would put a crippling blow on it. Go on for 60 days of bombing. Just knock the shit out of them—

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: And then, everybody would say, "Oh, horrible, horrible, horrible." [laughs] That's all right. You agree or not?

Kissinger: Absolutely. Absolutely!

279. National Security Decision Memorandum 141¹

Washington, November 26, 1971.

TO

The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense

SUBJECT

Herbicides in Vietnam

The President has reviewed your memoranda, respectively dated September 30 and August 9, 1971,² on the subject of Vietnamization of

¹ Source: Ford Library, Laird Papers, Box 39, Chemical Warfare & Biological Research, Vol. III. Secret. A copy was sent to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

² Neither found, but on August 9 Laird sent Rogers a letter stating: "The plan for Vietnamization of herbicide capabilities has become an issue that I feel can no longer be

herbicide operations. The President has also reviewed the Acting Secretary of Defense's memorandum of November 3³ regarding the use of herbicides by U.S. forces and the Secretary of State's views as contained in his memorandum of November 18, 1971.⁴

The President has made the following decisions pending his review of the current Geneva Protocol⁵ and NSSM 112⁶ studies:

—Beyond December 1, 1971, American Embassy Saigon and COMUSMACV shall have joint authority to use herbicides around U.S. bases and U.S. installations when considered essential for the protection of U.S. forces in those cases where other means are not available or satisfactory because of the presence of mines, booby traps or tactical wire. Use will continue to be restricted to these limited base and installation perimeter operations conducted only by helicopter or ground-based spray equipment under the same regulations as apply in the United States.

—The U.S. will not take the initiative in any plans for the Vietnamization of herbicide capabilities or the provision of spray equipment and/or training and technical assistance. There should be no stimulation of the GVN to acquire or develop herbicide capabilities.

—In the event the GVN requests assistance from COMUSMACV and American Embassy Saigon, the U.S. shall provide only that ground spray equipment determined necessary by COMUSMACV and American Embassy Saigon and presently available and not required for use by U.S. forces in Vietnam for the GVN to conduct limited herbicide operations for perimeters of fire bases and installations consistent with the guidelines established herein for U.S. operations. UC-123 aircraft,

delayed. The departure from Vietnam of knowledgeable individuals in herbicide operations and the intense interest, public and congressional, generated by this question has prompted my action in this matter. As a result, I have decided to forward the plan to the President at this time." (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330-76-197, Box 84, 387.64, Jul-Aug 1971)

³ In a November 3 memorandum to Nixon, Packard wrote that the U.S. military had tried several alternatives to the use of the herbicides Agent Blue and Agent White for vegetation control around mines, booby traps, and barbed wire, but none was adequate. He added, "Lives have been lost as a direct result of the lack of adequate defoliation around fire bases and installations." As a result, he requested the authority to use herbicides for these purposes beyond the December 1 deadline stipulated in Kissinger's August 18 memorandum to Laird and Rogers. (Ford Library, Laird Papers, Box 39, Chemical Warfare & Biological Research, Vol. III) Kissinger's August 18 memorandum is Document 247.

⁴ Not found.

⁵ See footnote 4, Document 247.

⁶ See footnote 5, Document 247.

related spray systems and equipment, or helicopter spray systems will not be provided.

—If any training or technical assistance is requested, the U.S. will limit such assistance to that necessary for the perimeter operations mentioned above.

—There will be no commitment by the U.S. Government to supply additional stocks of herbicides to the GVN.⁷

Henry A. Kissinger

⁷ In a December 3 memorandum to Nixon, Laird asked for an amendment of the NSDM to allow the U.S. military to supply the GVN with 15 helicopter spray systems and additional stocks of herbicide if clearly needed. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-229, NSDMs, NSDM 141)

280. Conversation Among President Nixon, his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and his Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)¹

Washington, December 12, 1971.

[Omitted here is discussion of the crisis in South Asia. A transcript of this portion of the conversation is in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume E-7, Documents on South Asia, 1969–1972, Document 177.]

Nixon: I've got an idea—some ideas on Vietnam I'd like just to go over now. What—take a couple of minutes. One—one on Vietnam. [pause] And I should think there's no appeal from this. I was shocked, though, to find that Porter was dancing around. I know because we have not given him better instructions with regard to this postponement of the meeting, and where they—he allowed the other side to say that we were sabotaging the meetings. Now, the instruction is: there is to be no meeting for two weeks.²

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 637-3. No classification marking. This transcript was prepared by the editors specifically for this volume. The exchange is part of a larger conversation, 8:45–9:42 a.m.

² Nixon is referring to the plenary (public) meetings in Paris.

Kissinger: All right.

Nixon: Maybe three weeks—two weeks.

Haig: [unclear]

Nixon: I marked it down on the news summary. Two weeks, there is to be no meeting [unclear]—

Kissinger: There won't be one next week, already.

Nixon: I—I understand. He's not going to have one the next week, either.

Kissinger: All right.

Nixon: We—

Kissinger: Well, if we crack them, they'll cancel next week—

Nixon: We, we have to be [unclear]. Well, let's be quite honest with ourselves here with regard to the Russian thing, and with regard to this. You know, we—and there is a difference of view on this, and I may be wrong, but I believe that the North Vietnamese, in the talks that they've had with us, from the time of the bombing halt, their talks with you, and so forth, they're diddling us along. I don't think there's ever been any serious intention—

Kissinger: Except for a four-week period last summer, but—

Nixon: Maybe, maybe. I doubt it. But, nevertheless, if there was a four-week period, there was, but you have gone over to Paris. I—I have no regrets that we have. I think it's necessary to make the record, and so forth, so we've made the record. But, at this point, as far as those talks are concerned, it's ten for them and one for us. The illusion that they're talking peace at this point is ridiculous.

Kissinger: Right—

Nixon: They haven't. They've sabotaged them. When you talk about sabotage, they've sabotaged. Now, of course, I've got to—you've got to put the boys—Haig is the best—while we're gone on the plan, because I may decide to move a lot sooner with regard to calling Porter back. The plan, of course, is—that we presently have—is to go, is to make our public statement shortly after the first of the year. You know, our six-month withdrawal, or whatever the hell we're going to do. And it will be that. There isn't going to be any more of this shit-ass stuff of runnin' over to Paris and waiting two more months. We've done that enough.

Kissinger: No—

Nixon: We're not going to hear from them. And so, not hearing from them means that we have no choice, having told them. If we waste another two months in office, in January, they'll think we're the weakest, because that's the whole problem we've got here.

Kissinger: No, the two months—no, I think—

Nixon: You see, the other two months was right, because we made that in the context—

Kissinger: Well, the advantage of two months in January, Mr.—first of all, I think—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —which—the two-month announcement in January was not a sign of weakness to them, but a sign of strength. They expected a total [unclear]—

Nixon: The last one, well, I know, was right, because—

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: —because—and it flabbergasted them totally. But, if this time, we follow it again the other way, then there is—there's nothing in it for us, because we say, "Well, we're going to negotiate for two more months." They know they're not negotiating. They know that we don't expect them to negotiate—

Kissinger: No. It wouldn't be the negotiation. The advantage—I—we—as you remember, our original plan was to go the full thing, then, in January, and there's something, a lot to be said. The advantage of two months is to get you over the China trip, while keeping the thing still fogged up.

Nixon: We may do that. My point is—

Kissinger: And—

Nixon: My point is, whatever the situation is in January, Porter's coming home.

Kissinger: That's fine.

Nixon: He cannot continue to be over there with [unclear]. That is just not making any sense.

Kissinger: That, I agree with—

Nixon: We must not continue for three years, and we are—we are the ones responsible here. After we had called a bombing halt, they were originally responsible. But, starting in January of '69, first with Lodge and Walsh,³ and then with poor old Bruce and the rest, we have been suckers. We've thought we played to them, and those talks have been nothing but nothing, believe me. They haven't helped us a bit in this country. The talks have hurt us in this country, very badly. I polled this, and I found 80 percent of the people think the talks are finished. From our standpoint [unclear] the beginning—80 percent of the American people.

³ Lawrence E. Walsh, Deputy Head of the Delegation to the Paris Talks on Vietnam, January 20–November 21, 1969.

Kissinger: Well, what I would recommend—

Nixon: So—

Kissinger: —is to call Porter home—

Nixon: —we've got to stop kidding ourselves—

Kissinger: No, no. I would—I would consider very seriously putting the full record out in January, calling Porter home, and making—

Nixon: Putting the record out is [unclear]—

Kissinger: —and making a two-month announcement, and that—just to keep your opposition off, off balance.

Nixon: All right. We're on the same track. The two months is fine. What I meant is, what I meant is, we cannot put it off two months on the basis that we're going to wait on the, on the ground for—

Kissinger: No, we just say—

Nixon: —on the negotiating track. That's the point.

Kissinger: No, no, we—I—

Nixon: We do it for two months. If we don't do it for the purpose of negotiation, why are we just waiting two months, Henry? That's the point—

Kissinger: Why are we doing two months? So that we can gauge it [unclear].

Nixon: We can gauge in terms of the—I know, I know, the infiltration, and the other things, I understand—

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: And then, I—and then, right after the China trip, when you're riding high on a lot of other things, I'd do the rest of it, 'cause otherwise—

Nixon: And then, after the China trip goes, we should do the rest of them, and then, we do have to do it in some way where we get the POW thing in there. [unclear] That's when we have to do that, and at that point. You see? You understand? You cannot—that is the—that's the clinker in this whole plan. The clinker in this plan is that there's—that down the road, you've still got those, those POW things, and—well, there ain't no problem there. At that point, when you're down to—[laughs] You know, we'll be down to 70,000 [military personnel in South Vietnam] at that point, won't we?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: So, at 70,000 you say, "Well, we'll keep 40,000 here 'til we get the POWs." Correct?

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: Is that what you had in mind?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: All right, we'll get a plan. But getting Porter back is essential.

Kissinger: I agree.

Nixon: We've got to stop those goddamn Paris—

Kissinger: I'm strongly in favor of that.

Nixon: —the Paris thing. Now, how about sooner than the 31st with Porter? How about sooner?

Kissinger: No, I'd do it the first week of January.

Nixon: All right—

Kissinger: The first ten days.

Nixon: Now, that brings me to the second part of the equation. It may be that we should not delay the strikes in the North.⁴ Now, your concern is the Chinese, as I understand it?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: I don't believe that is a—if the Chinese respect strength—after all, that is strength—and I'm inclined to think that if they, if they want to see the Yankee do—if they see him do any place, anywhere—it's like EC-121 and its relationship to the rest. It may be that we're better off to get, on a crash basis, to get those people to where we can get them to man, man up, right now. Now, do you understand?

Kissinger: I would, I would wait until—while we're screaming at the UN about world opinion, I wouldn't get it confused. These five days don't make any difference.

Nixon: Good. All right. What is—

Kissinger: If you're concerned about the—

Nixon: I am concerned about the effect on the Chinese, and the Russians, and the Indians. Now, if the Russians, and the Chinese, and the Indians have an impression that the man in the White House is tough, that's the only hope we've got. You see, you're—we're not throwing enough toughness into the equation. We look soft every place in the world.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: So, my feeling is, one way we can look somewhat tough in a collateral area is to hit that. See, that's been my argument on the bombing, anyway.

Kissinger: I agree. And for that, it would have—now, I think to do it right now, when maybe—

⁴ See footnote 3, Document 278.

Nixon: Yes—

Kissinger: —the Chinese are moving, it will give the Russians a ploy. I'd—I'd do it un—after the—after this UN thing has played out. If you give the order on Wednesday,⁵ we can get it done by Friday.

[Omitted here is further discussion of China.]

⁵ December 15.

281. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)¹

Washington, December 18, 1971.

Nixon: Getting back to the, to the North Vietnamese thing, it may be that they're just deciding on the—maybe to knock over Laos, that that may be their limited objective, at this point, for this season.² What do you think? [unclear]—

Haig: I—I think Laos and Cambodia, which is really a manifestation of their weakness, but it's—it happens to be also the toughest thing for us to manage.

Nixon: It sure is. It sure is.

Haig: Well, I think—I don't think they're going to knock over either one, but I think they're going to give us—

Nixon: Well—

Haig: —a big step back.

Nixon: Well [unclear] knock over and to hit Laos [unclear] Cambodia.

Haig: Cambodia, the danger there is an internal collapse—

Nixon: Yes, internal collapse problem—

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 637–14. No classification marking. This transcript was prepared by the editors specifically for this volume. The exchange is part of a larger conversation, 2:10–2:31 p.m.

² Earlier in the morning of December 18, Haig and Nixon discussed Laos, with Haig reporting that the North Vietnamese had begun an offensive in Laos “thirty days earlier than we hoped it would.” Haig stated that the North Vietnamese had “moved long-range artillery in and a massive amount of anti-aircraft and we have learned in the last operation, last spring, how they can be effective with it.” (Ibid., Conversation 639–09)

Haig: —problem.

Nixon: But, now, Lon Nol really wants to step down, actually. He's not too well [unclear].

Haig: I think he should become a figurehead and get out of things, but then he just seems to be emotionally unable to do that. Now, they've got the doctor looking at him this week, and I think—

Nixon: How are the—but the South Vietnamese, in that division, are being any better led at all, or is that [unclear] guy still in?³

Haig: Well, he's done all right, sir—

Nixon: He doesn't move—

Haig: —but he's not, not aggressive.

Nixon: Well, at least—

Haig: He's capable, but not aggressive—

Nixon: —it's a hell of a, it's a hell of a good diversionary tactic, though, isn't it? [unclear]

Haig: It did take some heat off. They've moved two of the regiments of that division back into Chup, but they left the real tough regiment, 271, right along Route 6, and I think we're going to get some more trouble this week.

Nixon: You mean, that's the Communist 271?

Haig: But it did. It—it got the other two. It had to go back to protect the base where the ARVN were operating. So, we—we still got some work to do there.

Nixon: Now, what are we doing? [unclear] air power, I suppose—?

Haig: Oh, we're using massive air, but that's—

Nixon: It doesn't help?

Haig: That's not going to solve everything. It helps, but it's not the answer.

Nixon: Jesus Christ, you wonder about air power. I've got pretty much a command of the air throughout this miserable war. It doesn't mean a hell of a lot.

Haig: No.

Nixon: Hmm?

Haig: It's especially helpful with the ARVN, because they've learned how to use it. The Cambodians don't know how to use it. They don't know how to control it, and bring it in close, and use it like they would artillery.

Nixon: Hmm.

³ Not further identified.

Haig: And, frankly, where, in the earlier days, when there were no Cambodians, just enemy, we could be more indiscriminate about it. Now, we've got troops all around, and you can kill your own people, unless it's properly controlled. So, it's less effective now than it was two years ago, in Cambodia.

[pause]

Nixon: We will be prepared. You can—you get the word to the Joint Chiefs that the time to hit is right after Christmas.⁴

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: I think that's the best time.

Haig: I do, too. I think anything now would be very bad—

Nixon: December 26th, 7th, and 8th; it's a good time. It's a—all right. And—and give 'em a hell of a wallop [unclear]. Right?

Haig: That's why you've got—

Nixon: It's about those—the airfields, at least, where the MIGs came from.

Haig: Exactly.

Nixon: They won't expect that, do you think—attacks on the airfields?

Haig: No, I don't think they'll expect this kind of a sock. This is a three-day sock up as far as Binh, including—no civilian targets, of course, but there are some good military targets around Binh [unclear].

Nixon: And some are in close, that we haven't hit before, I understand.

Haig: That's right, sir. And then, we would also include having this South Vietnamese off-shore rocketing, which is a good thing for them, too.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

[pause]

Haig: They're squealing like pigs about postponement of Paris. That really got their attention there.

Nixon: I think we should've gotten their attention, don't you agree?

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: I mean, my feeling is that those—that Paris talks, they are greased two-for-them and one-for-us, all the time. I mean, we are just—what the Christ has happened at the talks? Nothing.

⁴ See footnote 3, Document 278.

Haig: Yeah.

Nixon: Nothing, but just delay. What are these people—we're postponing peace? Shit, they haven't talked about anything, have they?

Haig: No, these people don't have any response for you, on this. I don't think—I think they were going to make some kind of an initiative, which would've been a propaganda initiative, and they haven't had a chance to do it.

Nixon: Oh, good.

Haig: Uh—

Nixon: Now, we pushed it off two weeks, right after [unclear]?

Haig: Yes, sir. Now, Porter has done a superb job over there.

Nixon: He's done exactly what he was supposed to do, and [unclear]

Haig: He's very good.

Nixon: He speaks well and everything. And—and that makes sense. Goddamnit, I—I don't know whether they've just been delaying and haggling, filibustering, and so we're just going to sit there and take it. I think that gets their attention.

Haig: I do, too, because they don't want to lose that.

Nixon: The propaganda war.

Haig: Right. [unclear]

Nixon: It's talk, talk, fight, fight. It's the old trick. You know, they did that in Korea for a long time. I think the postponement, and then, and then a good sock right after Christmas may have some effect. I don't know. I must say, though, that [unclear] possibility [unclear] talk on March 7th.

Haig: Yeah.

Nixon: It seems to me that the Chinese and the Russians have spoken—given them assurances of help. Don't you think so? We would—We've always figured the Chinese and all the Russians simply won't talk to the North Vietnamese. Hell, I noticed that the biggest shipments that—since 1964 have come in—

Haig: Yeah.

Nixon: —by sea, right?

Haig: Well, I've never trusted the Soviet side. I think the Soviets are real mischief-makers. I think that this India-Pak thing is going to strengthen us with China.⁵ And it's because China has seen its weakness.

Nixon: Yeah.

⁵ A reference to the American role in the recent Indo-Pakistan war.

Haig: Dramatically. It's got to recoup. The only way it can recoup is by moving closer to us, and they really may be more helpful. They, now, see a new threat. Uncle Sam is no longer the threat; it's the Indians, and the Soviet-backed Indians. So, I have a feeling we're going to get some benefits from this with the Chinese—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: —which in turn will translate themselves into benefits in Laos and in Cambodia.

Nixon: China's with us. China's a hell of a lot closer to Laos and Cambodia than India.

Haig: That's right. And that's one of the few benefits of this exercise. But, I really think we will realize some help from it.

282. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, December 22, 1971, 1:50 p.m.

P: Anything new? I got pretty much tied up with my domestic problems today.

K: There is a big North Vietnamese offensive in the Plain of Jars.

P: Yes.

K: I have called the Special Action Group together for tomorrow morning. We were given absolutely no warning about these North Vietnamese concentrations.

P: So our intelligence broke down again.

K: Either the intelligence or the way it is being transmitted. They have overrun all the fire bases. They are within artillery range of Long Tieng. It is going to be tough to hold.

P: Well they won't get it all. It is going to wash back and forth, back and forth, isn't it?

K: Unless they are pursuing the strategy we discussed yesterday to inflict the maximum blow before they move to the diplomatic move.

P: Right. Otherwise nothing new?

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Laos and Vietnam.]

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Chronological File, Box 12. No classification marking.

283. Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group¹

Washington, December 23, 1971, 11:08 a.m.–12:46 p.m.

SUBJECT

Laos

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

Mr. U. Alexis Johnson

Mr. William Sullivan

DOD

Mr. G. Warren Nutter

Mr. Dennis Doolin

Mr. Armistead Selden

Major Curtis Cook

JCS

Adm. Thomas H. Moorer

Lt. Gen. John Vogt

CIA

Mr. Thomas Karamessines

Mr. William Nelson

NSC Staff

Col. Richard T. Kennedy

Mr. John H. Holdridge

Mr. John Negroponce

R/Adm. Robert Welander

Mr. Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—A memorandum will be prepared for the President, giving him three options on the level and nature of our responses to the North Vietnamese attacks in Laos. The three options are: (1) Reinforcing the line defending Long Tieng as well as placing significant infantry and artillery forces in a position to defend against encroachments on the junction of routes 7 and 13; (2) Maintaining a strong defense of the Long Tieng line; (3) Diverting forces to routes 7 and 13 from the Long Tieng line.

—Maximum U.S. air support—both tactical and B-52s—should be provided.

—Dr. Kissinger will obtain the President's guidance on what steps, if any, to take to overcome the problem caused by the Congressional ceiling of \$350 million for expenditures in Laos in FY 72.²

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House.

² On October 4, the Senate adopted an amendment sponsored by Senator Symington to the Defense Procurement bill (HR 8687) that limited U.S. expenditures in Laos to \$350 million. (*Congress and the Nation*, 1969–1972, Vol. III, pp. 916–920)

—The State Department will draft a response from the President to Prime Minister Thanom of Thailand, concerning the use of additional Thai regulars in Laos.³

—Consideration should be given to the idea of making a public explanation of why we are increasing our air activity in Laos.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

³ Sent as telegram 230898 to Bangkok, December 24; see *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XX, Southeast Asia, 1969–1972, Document 148.

284. Letter From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker)¹

Washington, January 1, 1972.

Dear Ellsworth:

In connection with his January troop withdrawal announcement tentatively planned for around January 15th,² the President is considering making a public offer of the private negotiating proposal that General Haig outlined in September and President Thieu endorsed.³ The purpose would be to formalize the proposal publicly in order to seize the opportunity to take an initiative and defuse possible Congressional and public pressure which may develop when Congress reconvenes.

I have enclosed the proposal which would be the basis for the President's statement.⁴ Before the November 20 private session was aborted⁵ we had passed to the other side the full proposal. We did this (1) to make sure that the offer would be transmitted to the other side in case a meeting did not actually take place (this turned out to be prov-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files, Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David Cables, 1-7/31/72. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only.

² On January 13, the President announced he was ordering the withdrawal of 70,000 U.S. troops from Vietnam over the next 3 months. (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1972*, p. 30)

³ See Document 268.

⁴ The attached proposal was the eight points given to the North Vietnamese on October 11 in Paris; see Document 269. Nixon outlined the proposal in his Address to the Nation, January 25; see Document 294.

⁵ See Document 272.

idential); and (2) to make the initial meeting productive rather than merely a session at which they could only receive the package and refer to Hanoi for instructions, thus losing weeks of time.

Before proceeding further, I would like you to think over the idea of making the proposal public at this time and give me your personal judgment on it including your feel for its acceptability to President Thieu. You should not discuss this with Thieu, however, until you receive a go-ahead from here.

No one other than the President and I are aware that he is thinking of making this proposal public. I will appreciate your thoughts as soon as possible in our special channel.⁶

Warm regards,

Henry A. Kissinger⁷

⁶ Bunker responded in backchannel message 6 from Saigon, January 3, that he believed Thieu would accept the proposal. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 854, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. XIII)

⁷ Kissinger signed "Henry" above his typed signature.

285. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

Situation in North Laos

Background

The Lao Government forces have suffered a number of serious reverses in North Laos. Relying on numerical superiority and new firepower, including 130 m.m. cannon and much AAA, the North Vietnamese have pushed the Lao and Thai irregulars off the Plain of Jars. Friendly losses have been substantial.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-84, WSAG Meetings, Laos 1/3/72. Top Secret. Sent for action. Printed from an unsigned copy, which is attached as Tab A to a January 2 memorandum from Holdridge and Kennedy to Kissinger, briefing him for a WSAG meeting scheduled for January 3.

Part of Hanoi's success has been attributable to unseasonably bad weather which has minimized the effectiveness of our air power. This weather is now reported to be reverting to its normal dry season pattern which should make our air more effective. Thus far all requests for air support are being met, and the USAF has the capability of surging its sortie rate to a level substantially above the present one for at least a month.

Nonetheless the North Vietnamese are now in a position either to move south against the line defending the Meo stronghold at Long Tieng south of the Plain of Jars or to move west of the plain towards the strategic junctions of routes 7 and 13. If they move against Long Tieng, they may be able to take and hold it for at least the duration of the dry season and in the process perhaps eliminate the Meo as a fighting force. If they seize the route 7/13 junction, they would be in position to move their forces by truck toward the Vientiane Plain and the Mekong River. Accomplishment of either purpose would further upset the political/military balance in Laos and intensify pressures in the Vientiane government to accommodate to Hanoi's political/military demands, namely an end to U.S. involvement in Laos with particular emphasis on a countrywide bombing halt.

Issues for Decision

Against this background, two issues have arisen requiring your decision:

—First, the strategic issue of the level and nature of our response to these North Vietnamese attacks.

—Second, a domestic U.S. political issue of how to fashion our response in light of a legislative ceiling of \$350 M for FY-72 expenditures in Laos. Expenditures already programmed for the fiscal year are likely to exceed the \$350 M ceiling, and any additional corrective steps in light of the present situation will certainly result in an overrun.

The Strategic Options

We already have taken steps to replace equipment lost on the Plain and bring available reinforcements into the area. Maximum U.S. air support, both tactical and B-52's, is being brought to bear and will continue (fortunately, this cost is excluded from the congressional ceiling).

At a WSAG meeting on December 23,² the Laos situation was discussed and three general strategic options were developed for your consideration:

² See Document 283.

Option 1: The High Option: This would involve taking steps to reinforce the line defending Long Tieng as well as placing significant infantry and artillery forces in a position to defend against encroachments on the junction of routes 7 and 13. This option could conceivably involve asking the Thai to provide regular forces since resources are not otherwise immediately available to achieve these dual military objectives.

Advantages: This option would have a confidence building impact on the Lao and a correspondingly discouraging impact on Hanoi which would see that it cannot expect its advances to go unchallenged. It could also help frustrate Hanoi's efforts to mount a successful political/military campaign prior to your China visit.

Disadvantages: Shortage of local manpower resources is the principal disadvantage. The Thai could be asked to provide regular forces but, because of congressional restrictions, they would have to bear the cost of their expendable supplies and troop pay themselves. With PL-480 off-set possibilities exhausted and supporting assistance funds already near rock-bottom, it would be difficult to find a suitable quid pro quo to offer the Thai for stationing a regiment or two in North Laos. Also because of legislative provisions, you would have to sign a Presidential Determination permitting the Thai to use their U.S.-supplied equipment in Laos.

Option 2: Strong Defense of the Long Tieng Line: This option would involve pursuing essentially our present strategy of defending Long Tieng while doing what we can to defend the narrow defile on route 7 west of Muong Soui primarily with artillery. It would bring to bear the maximum available Thai and Lao irregular forces to deny the Meo stronghold at Long Tieng to the enemy. We would count heavily on air to interdict the lengthened NVA supply lines resulting from the NVA move to the west.

Advantages: This option can probably be pursued without additional manpower resources. If Long Tieng holds through the dry season, it will deny Hanoi an important psychological victory and probably keep the Meo intact as a fighting force near the Plain of Jars for another year.

Disadvantages: This option leaves the Route 7/13 junction more exposed than does option 1 and takes the risk that Hanoi will divert its advance to that direction. Nor can we be certain yet whether the available friendly forces can hold Long Tieng if the NVA mounts a determined drive. But, in view of the terrain barrier, they probably can prevent the NVA from breaking through in this area to the lowlands.

Option 3: Diversion of Resources to Routes 7/13 from the Long Tieng Line: This option would involve trying to do something on the ground in both areas, without augmenting manpower resources. In effect it

would involve thinning the defenses of the Long Tieng line to make a stronger defense to the north, leaving only enough forces before Long Tieng to fight a guerrilla action.

Advantages: This option would emphasize what may be the militarily more significant of the two areas in question. (Route 13 connects the royal capital of Luang Prabang with the administrative capital of Vientiane.)

Disadvantages: Moving resources away from the Long Tieng defense line would dishearten the Meo, which could mean their disintegration as an effective fighting force, since Long Tieng is a symbol of their ultimate hope to settle some day on the Plain of Jars. Rather than pursuing a token or guerrilla defense of the Long Tieng area, they could well choose to relocate entirely to some other area such as western Laos.

My Views on Options. I believe the psychological effect of losing Long Tieng would be severe. We have devoted substantial resources to its successful defense over the past two years and, apart from its importance to the Meo, the fact that it has been in friendly hands during this time has had a favorable impact on the attitudes of Lao leadership in Vientiane. Moreover, there is no evidence yet that the NVA will move towards the junction of routes 7 and 13. They may, but they have not in previous years.

We are also constrained by manpower shortages. Manpower resources are, at this stage in any event, simply inadequate to assure a strong defense of both the Long Tieng line and the 7/13 junction. Therefore, we should dispose the bulk of our effort against the known threat to Long Tieng and protect the possible axis of attack along route 7 with whatever artillery we can muster (e.g., option 2).

I further believe this is the choice which leaves us the greatest flexibility to move to other options if necessary. Meanwhile, we can also take soundings with the Thai to see what they may be prepared to provide by way of additional forces should the situation deteriorate further and to build a reserve.

Financial Limitations: Whichever of the three options you prefer, we undoubtedly will surpass the congressionally imposed \$350 M FY-72 ceiling, barring unforeseen developments on the negotiating front. Viewed in these terms, we could, of course, decide to do only what we can within the prescribed financial limits. This would inhibit our ability to take the measures required under any of the options. The choice, therefore, appears to be one of deciding (1) whether we should select a course designed to meet the situation on the ground or (2) fall short of these requirements because of the potential domestic political costs.

A request for a ceiling increase risks the charge that the war is being broadened. But when Senators Symington and Stennis set the \$350 M ceiling for our FY-72 Laos expenditures, they did so with the

286. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Johnson) and the Deputy Secretary of Defense (Packard)¹

Washington, January 3, 1972.

SUBJECT

Economic Support for Vietnam

It is important to evaluate the economic support required by the South Vietnamese economy over the coming years, as well as the alternative ways of meeting that requirement.

The first phase of this study should focus on how the essential level of foreign exchange support can be provided during CY 1972 and should include examination of:

—The foreign exchange support required by Vietnam in 1972;

—The potential sources of this support, including: (1) means of reducing the AID project to free supporting assistance funds for imports, (2) potential DOD actions to slow the reduction in foreign exchange availability, and (3) ways to keep up the level of PL-480 support despite rice self-sufficiency;

—The legislative problems, requirements for Presidential or other determination, and budget limitations.

The second phase should examine probable economic requirements from 1973 through 1976 based on alternative assumptions regarding the rate of economic growth, the level of military activity, and other key variables. Support from DOD, PL-480, and AID should be projected with policy alternatives clearly identified.

Actions to increase foreign exchange availabilities should not be delayed pending completion of the study.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 158, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Jan–Feb 72. Secret. Odeen forwarded the memorandum to Kissinger under a December 22 covering memorandum which indicated that he had redrafted it to ask for both a near and long term study. Copies were sent to the Director of Central Intelligence, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, the Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors, the Administrator of the Agency for International Development, the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for International Affairs, and the Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for International Affairs.

The study shall be prepared under the direction of the Vietnam Special Studies Working Group. The first phase should be completed by January 19, 1972, and the second phase by mid-February 1972.²

Henry A. Kissinger

² The Vietnam Special Studies Group completed the study and submitted it to the President by February 17. The President's decision and implementing instructions are in National Security Decision Memorandum 154. See *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume VIII, Vietnam, January 20–October 7, 1971, Document 29.

287. Information Memorandum From the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Johnson) to Secretary of State Rogers¹

Washington, January 3, 1972.

WSAG Meeting on Laos

The WSAG meeting which was held at 12:00 noon on January 3 dealt exclusively with the subject of Laos.² It addressed the immediate problem of defending Long Tieng as well as the longer range problems of sustaining the friendly positions in Laos. In discussing these problems it was universally recognized that the current North Vietnamese tactic is to try to involve us more deeply and more extensively in Laos in the hope of exacerbating our problems with the Congress and the public.

On the immediate problem of defending Long Tieng, the following decisions were taken:

(a) The only feasible source for additional troops for this purpose would be Thai SGU forces.

(b) CIA was therefore directed to examine the possibility of increasing the available Thai SGU force in the Long Tieng area. Two avenues are to be explored. The first would be to expedite the return to Laos of those ten battalions which were withdrawn for rest and recuperation after the collapse of the Plaine des Jarres, as well as expediting the introduction into Laos of those Thai SGU forces currently in

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, DEF 1–1 US. Top Secret; Nodis. Drafted by Sullivan.

² No minutes of the meeting were found.

training. The second avenue would be through persuading the RTG to permit members of trained regular Thai units to volunteer for the SGU forces, presumably as replacements or fillers in the depleted ranks of the ten evacuated battalions.

(c) The Joint Chiefs of Staff were directed to send instructions to General Lavelle, Commander of the Seventh Air Force, to visit Bangkok and through Ambassador Unger to give appropriate Thai officials assurances about the use of United States air power in Laos. We are sending a separate cable to Unger alerting him to this visit.

(d) Kissinger will call Laird to convey the President's desire that Laird take appropriate action with Senator Stennis either to have a more flexible interpretation of the accounting process under the Symington Amendment or else to arrange for Senate action in the new session to increase the authorization of \$350 million currently provided by the Symington Amendment.

In addition to these decisions on short range matters, the following decisions were made with respect to the longer range problems:

(a) It was decided that, for the time being, no action should be taken to seek a way out of the inhibitions against United States support for Thai regular forces operating in Laos as provided by the Fulbright Amendment to the Defense Appropriations Act. It was pointed out, however, that the President could make an official finding that the support of such forces was "required to insure the safe and orderly withdrawal or disengagement of U.S. forces from Southeast Asia". It was considered that, by logical extenuation, an agreement could be made for such a finding, but at a considerable political price with the Congress and the public. It was decided that current circumstances were not so bleak as to require such action at this time.

(b) It was further universally agreed that it was important to try to keep the remnants of the Meo forces intact as a fighting unit and not let them become dispersed. To this end the CIA was instructed to put more emphasis upon the use of the Meo as guerrilla units rather than as forces utilized to defend fixed locations.

288. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, January 10, 1972.

SUBJECT

Results of our Recent Bombing of North Vietnam

CIA has acquired from a sensitive source who has access to the French delegation in Hanoi, information relating to our recent bombing raids against North Vietnamese targets.²

According to the French Delegate General in Hanoi, the North Vietnamese asked the French in Hanoi to officially protest the U.S. air strikes but when the French said that they would have to see the alleged places where U.S. air strikes had occurred, the North Vietnamese dropped the subject.

The source learned that the air strikes on December 27 completely destroyed the electricity plant near Vinh. He also heard that there were some casualties in a hospital in Vinh as the result of the total destruction of an ammunition dump which was located next to the hospital.

A school in Vinh was also hit, according to the source, but there were North Vietnamese troops at that school.

The source also reported that several U.S. pilots were killed by ground fire after they bailed out and were floating to the ground. CIA notes that the source did not state how he had learned this information.

The source stated it is his belief that these raids were more effective than past raids.

CIA is attempting to obtain additional information on this subject from the source.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 158, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Jan–Feb 72. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² Reference is to Operation Proud Deep Alpha; see footnote 3, Document 278. In a telephone conversation on December 27, Haig informed Nixon that Laird had received 21 questions on the strikes at a press conference that morning and "really blistered them on the DMZ, rocket attacks and failure to negotiate." Nixon responded, "Our whole purpose is not to escalate this," and added later in the conversation: "The White House should stay out of it. It is a routine protective reaction strike. Don't let Ron [Ziegler] escalate on it. I want him to sit on it all week long. The Secretary spoke to it and I have nothing to add. That is all I want him to say." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 998, Haig Chronological Files, Haig Telcons 1971 (1 of 2))

**289. Memorandum for the President's File by the President's
Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)¹**

Washington, January 13, 1972.

SUBJECT

Meeting with Hon. Melvin R. Laird, Secretary of Defense, on 13 January 1972,
at 10:30 a.m.

PARTICIPANTS

The President
Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird
Brigadier General Alexander M. Haig, Jr.

The President met with Secretary Laird to discuss the need for further modernization of the South Vietnamese armed forces.² The President indicated that he was not satisfied with the level and types of equipment being provided under the Vietnamization program. He stressed that there was a need for increased mobility through a greater density of helicopters. He questioned whether or not sufficient main force units were being developed. Finally, he pointed out that there were some serious doubts about whether the South Vietnamese Air Force was being adequately equipped to cope with the threat of offensive North Vietnamese actions following the withdrawal of U.S. air forces.

Secretary Laird reassured the President that he would review in detail further modernization requirements for the South Vietnamese armed forces. He noted, however, that President Thieu in his discussions with him had conveyed the impression that he did not want any additional main force South Vietnamese units.³ General Haig interjected that this was contrary to discussions he had had with President Thieu who had told him personally that he was in fact concerned and especially wished to create another ARVN Division in I Corps and perhaps an additional division as a strategic reserve.⁴

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 998, Haig Chronological Files, Memcons, Jan–Dec 1972 (3 of 3). Top Secret; Sensitive. There is an extensive tape of this conversation with Laird in which he and the President discussed what Laird should say to the press and in which they talked more generally about Vietnam than Haig's summary account indicates. (Ibid., White House Tapes, January 13, 10:35–11:05 a.m., Conversation 647–7)

² In a December 3 memorandum to Nixon, Laird reported on the progress by ARVN, noting improvements in leadership citing a 12 percent decline in the number of combat troops in the last 21 months. He had proposed an increase in combat pay for all soldiers. (Ibid., NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-225, Policy Papers, NSDM 118)

³ See Document 275.

⁴ For a report on Haig's September 23 meeting with Thieu, see Document 268.

The President instructed Secretary Laird to look carefully at this problem and to ensure that we were not withdrawing at a rate and equipping South Vietnamese forces at a rate which would leave them vulnerable to a major North Vietnamese attack following our withdrawal. Secretary Laird reviewed for President Nixon the impressions he had obtained as a result of his just completed visit to South Vietnam. In general, his assessment was extremely optimistic, and he portrayed the definite picture that South Vietnamese forces would before long be able to meet any threat posed by residual North Vietnamese capabilities.⁵

⁵ Following the meeting, at 11:06 a.m., Nixon announced to the press the withdrawal of 70,000 troops over the next 3 months, bringing the troop ceiling to 69,000. Laird answered questions on the announcement. Nixon's statement is printed in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1972*, p. 30. Both the statement and the transcript of Laird's press conference are in the Department of State *Bulletin*, January 31, 1972, pp. 113–116.

290. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, January 17, 1972.

SUBJECT

U.S. Efforts in Laos Outside the Area of the Ho Chi Minh Trail

Secretary Laird has sent you a memorandum concerning the situation in Laos (Tab A).² The principal purpose of his memorandum is to strike a cautionary note regarding what can and should be done to respond to the emerging situation in north Laos.

Secretary Laird believes that the basic question facing us is whether to make an all out effort in Laos with the prospect of little gain or to seek to minimize the significance of NVA advances in northern Laos on the grounds that the enemy is hitting there because of his weakened position in South Vietnam. He favors the latter course because he

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 550, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. 9. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum reads, "The President has seen."

² Attached but not printed is a December 26 memorandum from Laird to Nixon with a stamped notation that reads, "The President has seen."

does not believe that we can rely on the Thai to provide the reinforcements or fighting spirit needed to stop the NVA in north Laos; he has little confidence in added use of air power and believes a major increase in effort would bring marginal gains at best. He is concerned about the political costs at home that would be entailed through an intensification of the air war in northern Laos.

The Secretary therefore concludes with the recommendation that the Administration move with great caution before extending our commitment and intensifying our effort in northern Laos.

Comment: There is growing evidence that the North Vietnamese are doing what they can in Laos and Cambodia to gain the maximum psychological impact in Indochina before your Peking trip. While we are constrained by Congressional limitations both with respect to the nature and the extent of our support, I can see little advantage in standing aside and not doing what we can within these constraints.³

The people in the field, including Ambassador Godley, have repeatedly said—and the evidence supports them—that our air support in Northern Laos is crucial both in terms of its direct effect on the enemy and the psychological boost it gives the friendly forces. If the North Vietnamese successfully break the defenses in Laos, we could be faced with that difficult political situation we have long sought to prevent—a Laotian call for a halt in the bombing of the Trail. Moreover, the Thai could hardly take comfort from a serious North Vietnamese threat to the Vientiane Plain. It certainly would be in the Thai interest to prevent this, if they could do so by responding to the Lao request for manpower assistance. It would likewise be in our interest to encourage the Thai to be as forthcoming as possible to Laotian requests for help.

None of the foregoing need involve us to any substantial measure beyond the air support we are already providing. Such support, in fact, is limited both by the ability to provide forward air control and the relatively restricted areas in which air power can be usefully applied. Thus, I see no reason for us not doing what we reasonably can and would not in any way consider the high priority we have assigned to air for North Laos as a major escalation of our effort.⁴

³ Nixon highlighted this paragraph.

⁴ Kissinger sent a memorandum to Laird on January 17 noting that Nixon had a read his memorandum with great interest and appreciated hearing his views. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 550, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. 9)

291. Minutes of a Meeting of the Senior Review Group¹

Washington, January 17, 1972, 3:09–4:05 p.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam Assessment

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

Mr. U. Alexis Johnson

Mr. William Sullivan

Mr. Arthur Hartman

Defense

Mr. Armistead Selden

Major Gen. Fred Karhos

Mr. Clay McManaway

Mr. Dennis Doolin

JCS

Adm. Thomas H. Moorer

B/Gen. Richard Bresnahan

CIA

Mr. Richard Helms

Mr. George Carver

Mr. Norman Jones

Treasury

Dr. Charls E. Walker

Mr. John J. McGinnis

NSC Staff

Col. Richard T. Kennedy

Mr. Philip Odeen

Mr. John Court

Mr. John Negroponte

Mr. Mark Wandler

It was agreed that:

—There should be a further evaluation of the military situation in Vietnam and of the measures designed to improve U.S. and RVNAF military capabilities in light of the enemy threats expected through July 1, 1972. In particular, the following areas should be examined: the enemy threat; immediate actions required to ensure U.S. and RVNAF readiness to cope with enemy activities; GVN manning and leadership problems; air support (including helicopters and STOL aircraft) for the South Vietnamese; and the size and composition of remaining U.S. forces in Vietnam.²

Dr. Kissinger: The primary purpose of the meeting today is to get a fix on what is ahead for us during the next three to six months in Vietnam. We should have some discussion on what remedial measures,

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-113, SRG Minutes, Originals, 1972–1973. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the Situation Room of the White House. All brackets are in the original.

² In a memorandum to Johnson, Packard, and Helms, January 19, Kissinger asked for these evaluations. (Ibid., Box H-62, SRG Meeting, Vietnam Assessment 1/17/72 (2 of 2))

if any, need to be taken. I don't know if all of you have read the CIA threat assessment.³ If everybody has read it, there is no sense in asking Dick [Helms] to give us a summary.

Mr. Helms: I think there is basic inter-agency agreement with the paper. Defense's views are consistent with ours.

Adm. Moorer: We should remember that this paper was prepared on the basis of a force level of 60,000 by July 1. Considering the President's latest withdrawal announcement, however, I don't know if all the statements in the paper still hold. In effect, we are compressing the withdrawal time schedule by 45 days.

Mr. Carver: The threat assessments presented in the paper are not materially affected by the increased withdrawal schedule.

Adm. Moorer: That's true. But our actions may be affected.

Dr. Kissinger: The increased withdrawal rate will not have an effect in terms of enemy capabilities.

Adm. Moorer: I agree.

Mr. Johnson: Is there anything new on the air side? During the last 45 days, the other side has been very aggressive, and it seems to have greatly increased its anti-aircraft capabilities.

Adm. Moorer: You're right. There are three aspects to this situation. The first aspect is missiles, mainly SA-2s. The NVA have 26 battalions south of 20 degrees. Four of these battalions are in Laos: two of them in the Tchepone area, and two around the Mu Gia pass. The second aspect is aircraft. There are now nine Migs south of 20 degrees, and they have been very active lately. Since January 1, there have been some 26 incursions into Laos. The third aspect is anti-aircraft capability, particularly in the Panhandle of North Vietnam and in Laos.

The enemy has greatly increased capability, therefore, to defend against our air, especially in the Trail area. He has also caused us to call off the slow movers in Laos. There is no indication, though, that the enemy has the ability to launch air-to-ground attacks. Nonetheless, we have to devote more air assets—such as a combat air patrol in the Danang area—to our operations. Their increased activities degrade to a certain extent our air efforts in Laos.

Mr. Johnson: Does this trend of increased degradation of our air efforts change our estimates of the enemy's throughput capabilities?

Adm. Moorer: No, not yet. As I said, we had to call off some interceptor aircraft and forward air controllers, and we had to devote some F-4s to combat air patrol. But I would not say yet that this has had a significant effect on our operations.

³ CIA Intelligence Memorandum SC-07029/72, "Enemy Strategy and Capabilities in Indochina through May 1972." (Ibid.)

The trend of enemy air activity is up. Since January 1, they have made 26 incursions into Laos. They made nearly 50 incursions since last October, but during the same time period of the year before they only made three of four incursions. The planes generally make a fast circle and then head back to North Vietnam. They've shot down one of our aircraft, fired two missiles at an F-4 and fired two other missiles at a B-52.

Mr. Sullivan: I think this activity is designed to have more of a political and psychological effect than a military effect. They want to cause some embarrassment to us in the air war—and this is just as much in their interest as is an offensive in MR II.

Adm. Moorer: I agree. The whole thing is designed to have a political effect.

Dr. Kissinger: As I read the assessment paper, I noticed a gap between the personnel and logistics infiltration. How do we explain this? Is this the key to their intentions? Are we not getting the right information? Is the infiltration of supplies keeping pace with the infiltration of personnel? Do they have caches?

Mr. Helms: I think they have a lot of supplies hidden in caches, but there is also some question about our information.

Adm. Moorer: This point about logistics is a good one, and we were working on it this morning. Will they make all the moves we think they can make without a full commitment of forces? We question that they have a strong logistical posture, although we must assume that they do. We don't have very accurate information because we haven't been able to intercept their tactical instructions. Perhaps they are using land lines.

Dr. Kissinger: It's not fair for the North Vietnamese to change the rules in the middle of the game.

Mr. Carver: Their logistical activity has picked up in the last week.

Dr. Kissinger: As I recall, last year, our analysis showed that they had enough logistic capability to engage in protracted warfare throughout the dry and wet seasons. This year they have less of a capability.

Mr. Jones: So far, but it's picking up rapidly.

Dr. Kissinger: I'm talking about right now. They don't have more than what's consistent with the strategy of protracted warfare. Is that right?

Mr. Jones: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: Can we assume that they will have the ability to launch an offensive in February in MR's I or II and sustain this offensive?

Mr. Jones: Yes, if the present rate of supply continues. The rate has accelerated very markedly in the last two or three weeks.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Jones) What do you mean by “very markedly?” Can you give me a percentage of increase? Do DIA and CIA agree this year?

Mr. Jones: There is no disagreement. In our paper, we estimated that from October, 1971, through January 4, 1972, the enemy moved approximately 11,000 tons of supplies through the system. Due to the increased rate of activity in the past couple of weeks, however, we estimate that the enemy will now be able to move about 17,000 tons during this dry season.

Dr. Kissinger: How does this compare to last year?

Mr. Jones: This dry season’s input performance through January 4 is roughly three-quarters of that achieved during the same period last year. There’s no question that they are behind, but they can make up the difference in short order.

Dr. Kissinger: Even if they do catch up, they’ll still only be able to engage in protracted warfare.

Mr. Jones: Even though the lag appears large in percentage terms, the absolute difference between this year’s and last year’s performance is not overwhelming. There is no great impediment to making up the difference, which will enable them to launch an offensive in MR I or MR II.

Dr. Kissinger: How long would this take? Would you say three weeks?

Mr. Jones: They can do this in a few months if they soon initiate the high level of input activity they have sustained in the past.

Dr. Kissinger: Is it your judgment then that with the present rate of supply they have the capability to mount high points of military activity, but that they still need a few more weeks of preparation in order to launch an offensive which will last two or three weeks?

Mr. Jones: Yes, I think that they will be able to launch an offensive within a month.

Dr. Kissinger: I draw two conclusions from what you just said. The first is that if they keep the present rate of supply, they could not launch an offensive next month. The second is that if they want to increase supply rate—and launch an offensive—they can do so.

Mr. Jones: What you say is true if they maintain the rate that they had from October through December. However, if they maintain the rate that they had during the last week they will be able to launch an offensive.

Dr. Kissinger: Let’s say they maintain the rate of last week. Even so, if I understand you correctly, it would still take them two or three weeks to get ready to launch an offensive.

Mr. Jones: Yes. That’s the judgment we make from the available data.

Dr. Kissinger: Following this analysis, we can't say that they are ready to attack any day and carry out a sustained offensive.

Adm. Moorer: I think they want to wait for Tet.

Dr. Kissinger: And probably for the visit to China, too.

Adm. Moorer: Yes, we've got to remember that they've always had high points of military activity like this. The infiltration pattern is also a little different this year. This time the enemy is infiltrating whole units rather than fillers. It's difficult to measure the logistics that these units are bringing with them. Consequently, we have another unknown in the situation.

Mr. Carver: There are two benchmark dates we have to keep in mind: Tet and February 20. Our analysis indicates that after Tet and after the President leaves for China, the situation will be noisy.

Dr. Kissinger: It will be noisy, but the President's visit will push the offensive off page one.

Mr. Carver: The North Vietnamese will be trying to push the President off page one. They know the battlefield very well. Incidentally, I don't think we can expect to get detailed warnings of their operations.

Dr. Kissinger: Why do you say that?

Mr. Carver: For one thing, our participation at the district level is much lower than it has been in the past. Another thing is that their communications are much more difficult to monitor now. They seem to be relying more on land lines in tactical situations. I think it's a bad mistake to assume that we will get two or three day advance warnings on their tactical operations.

Mr. Sullivan: They're announcing their intentions to the whole world. For the first time, they've infiltrated men ahead of logistics. Usually it's the other way around. You have to wonder whether they're trying to spoof us.

Adm. Moorer: We have to assume not.

Dr. Kissinger: But it is conceivable?

Adm. Moorer: Yes.

Mr. Carver: The North Vietnamese have never gone in for deception before. This is not to say, though, that they couldn't start now.

Mr. Sullivan: They've never given advance notice of what their intentions were, either. They've made several public claims.

Mr. Carver: We must be careful. We've obtained pre-attack directives for MRs I and II. But we have to remember that we've obtained directives like this before.

Gen. Karhos: We also give advance notice of our intentions.

Dr. Kissinger: We can expect the enemy to have an offensive capability in MR II in about three weeks. What about MR I? When will he have the capability to launch an offensive there?

Mr. Jones: That's a bit complicated, mainly because of the large food factor. It should require many months for the enemy to get ready. However, if we assume that he is committing his forces without large reserves of food, he can be ready to launch an offensive in two or three months.

Adm. Moorer: The North Vietnamese can move troops directly down the road in the western part of the DMZ.

Mr. Jones: If they move the 304th and the 324B divisions into MR I, they will be doubling their strength.

Dr. Kissinger: Could they launch an offensive in MR I before the trip to China, or is March the earliest they would be able to do it?

Mr. Jones: If they made a concerted effort to improve the logistical situation in MR I, move armament there and assure an adequate food supply, they could be ready within two months.

Dr. Kissinger: But you don't think they could do it before two months? I'm not going to shoot you if your judgment is wrong. I'm just trying to get a handle on the time frame.

Mr. Jones: My judgment is that it would take them two months.

Adm. Moorer: The South Vietnamese are stronger in MR I. I think the North Vietnamese will find MR I difficult, and I think they will make their move in MR II. Many of the infiltrators seem to be earmarked for the coastal regions there. I think the enemy could occupy temporarily a city like Pleiku. Perhaps he could also drive to the lowlands, which have traditionally been held by the VC. The enemy's preparations seem to indicate that this is what he will do. At any rate, we are getting more activity in MR II.

Mr. Carver: Of course, he can always go to Quang Tri any time he wants to.

Dr. Kissinger: That would be a violation of the 1968 understanding, wouldn't it?

Mr. Carver: That's right. But the road in the western part of the DMZ now gives them the capability of moving troops into Quang Tri. They've never had this capability before.

Mr. Jones: Let's set aside the food problem for the moment. In terms of arms, the SRG model of last April indicated that it would take 60 days to push enough through to launch an offensive and at the same time maintain adequate forces elsewhere.⁴

Dr. Kissinger: When does the rain begin in MR I?

⁴ See Document 179.

Gen. Karhos: It began in late September, with the northeast monsoon.

Mr. Sullivan: We're in the monsoon period now.

Dr. Kissinger: In other words they could move in July.

Gen. Karhos: They could have a high level of activity in June, July and August. Last year, the major actions in MR I occurred in our summer.

Dr. Kissinger: On the other hand, they could start low level actions anywhere, anytime. This is especially true in MRs I and II.

Let's talk for a minute about the ARVN capabilities.

Adm. Moorer: The South Vietnamese have the First and Second divisions in MR I, and a third division is becoming operational. In addition they have 175 MM artillery and tanks in operation. The tank operators in MR I are the best the South Vietnamese have. Perhaps the best leadership in the ARVN is found in MR I, too. That's why I think they're more ready there than they are in MR II. In MR II we've had some trouble with the leadership. This is being corrected, though. At any rate, they're aware of the problem. The current plans call for the Marines and airborne troops currently in the strategic reserves to be used in MRs I and II, respectively.

Dr. Kissinger: The Marines didn't do very well last year, did they?

Adm. Moorer: The Marines fought very well.

Dr. Kissinger: The airborne units weren't very good.

Adm. Moorer: They were the most aggressive South Vietnamese units around the Chup area. They didn't have very much staying power, but they were the most aggressive units the South Vietnamese had.

Dr. Kissinger: That's not saying very much.

Adm. Moorer: They took about 7,000 to 8,000 casualties. But still, they weren't as aggressive as they should have been. They did want to fight, however.

We must be sure that we have the lift capability to move the airborne troops where they are needed. This can be done with fixed wing aircraft, and I think we have an adequate capability.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Adm. Moorer) Do you think the troops in MR II will fight well enough?

Adm. Moorer: Yes, if they are attacked. They weren't as aggressive as they could have been when they moved into base area 702. Last year, though, they fought well. If the NVA attack, they will fight. But they won't go charging across Laos.

Mr. Sullivan: The commander of the 21st division has been replaced. I think this was a good move to make.

Adm. Moorer: The NVA had the 5th, 7th and 9th divisions in the Chup area when the South Vietnamese withdrew. We can expect the

NVA 7th division to stir things up and to try to prevent reinforcements from reaching MR II. Gen. Vien has already directed that one division from MR IV move up to MR II.

Dr. Kissinger: The division will be fighting out of its area. Will it do well?

Adm. Moorer: It has done well under its new leadership, but it remains to be seen how it will do away from home. Gen. Vien has published clear directives, stating exactly what he intends to do. His commanders know what is expected of them.

Dr. Kissinger: As I looked at the papers on ARVN capabilities,⁵ I noticed that most combat units were below 70% strength. On the other hand, most headquarter units were near 100% strength. Are they trying to imitate MACV? What's the problem? Are they just too top-heavy?

Adm. Moorer: I don't really know. One of the problems might be that the headquarters units only have a few hundred people, while other units have thousands. We have also had some difficulties with desertions, recruitment and the size of the ARVN. One problem, for example, is that the ARVN is continuously expanding. New units are always being activated, and this has an effect on the abilities of other units to stabilize and fill up.

Dr. Kissinger: Can we take a look at the personnel problem and make sure that everything that has to be done is being done to beef up the combat units?

I also have a question about helicopters.

Mr. Doolin: Before we discuss helicopters, I might say that we are looking into the manpower problem. We've asked Saigon to provide us with some of the answers to these problems by January 24.

Dr. Kissinger: Good. Let's talk about helicopters now. Can we get an up-to-date assessment of how many helicopters we will have left and how many the South Vietnamese will have? My main worry is that we will deprive the South Vietnamese of mobility.

Adm. Moorer: Let me outline the current program for you. The South Vietnamese are going to receive 496 small helicopters—mostly UH-1s, with the guns in the doors. So far they have five squadrons still in the process of becoming operationally ready.

Dr. Kissinger: Last year we ordered an increase in helicopter strength for the South Vietnamese.

⁵ Kissinger is apparently referring to a January 10 report entitled "RVN Assessment," prepared by the Department of Defense, and a December 3 memorandum from Laird to Nixon reporting on the improvements accomplished in response to NSDM 118. (Both *ibid.*) Regarding Laird's December 3 memorandum, see Document 290.

Adm. Moorer: That was done. We're also giving them CH-47s. These ships can lift up to 5,500 men.

Dr. Kissinger: I would have sworn that we decided to go above 528 (number of helicopters given to the South Vietnamese).

Adm. Moorer: We're going up to 528.

Dr. Kissinger: That's not a very great increase—to go from 500 to 528. (to Mr. Odeen) Phil, will you check on what we decided last year?

Mr. Odeen: Yes.

Adm. Moorer: The South Vietnamese will have the third largest helicopter force in the world.

Dr. Kissinger: That really doesn't mean very much.

Adm. Moorer: No, it doesn't, especially if they can't perform the proper maintenance on all of those helicopters.

Dr. Kissinger: How many helicopters will we have left?

Adm. Moorer: We plan to leave 156 UH-1s, 32 CH-47s, 86 gunships and 34 small helicopters.

Dr. Kissinger: How many do we have now?

Adm. Moorer: As of February, we will have over 1,200.

Dr. Kissinger: Between now and May 1, therefore, we will pull out more than 1,000 helicopters.

Adm. Moorer: That's right.

Dr. Kissinger: But this is exactly what we've been resisting for three years—the compulsion to get the helicopters out.

Adm. Moorer: But as the troop level decreases, we lose some flexibility. For example, it takes about 20% of our force level just to maintain security.

Dr. Kissinger: I know we had a meeting on this subject last year in the President's office.⁶ Laird and Packard were there. The President gave an order to keep the helicopter strength at the absolute maximum level. Can we get two plans: this one, and one that will keep the helicopter strength at its current level until the present operations are over?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. We have two problems. The first is maintaining adequate security, and the second is helicopters.

Gen. Karhos: The figures on helicopters result from the latest withdrawal announcement.

Dr. Kissinger: The drawdown has only been pushed forward by 45 days. We should have all the alternatives before we do anything irrevocable.

⁶ See Document 169.

Adm. Moorer: We were anticipating an additional drawdown 45 days later. Consequently, the figures wouldn't have been the same.

Dr. Kissinger: If we want to stay heavy in helicopters, we must sacrifice something else. What can we sacrifice? If we want to keep 700 helicopters, what other forces would have to come out? Once we get that, the President could take a look at it and make a decision.

Adm. Moorer: We can do that, and we can also review the security, intelligence collection and advisory problems.

Dr. Kissinger: Good. Let's take a look at it. As we do this over the next week, let's also take a look at what improvements can be made in the South Vietnamese forces before the various offensives begin.

Mr. Sullivan: One thing we should keep in mind, is that the NVA are moving 122 mm pieces into MR II. The South Vietnamese have nothing comparable, just some 175 mm howitzers in MR I.

Adm. Moorer: We'll take a look at that.

Gen. Karhos: The 122s are guns, and they outreach the 175 mm howitzers.

Dr. Kissinger: Someone should also take a look at the STOL program.⁷ What's the current situation with that?

Gen. Karhos: There's an ongoing test, with 30 aircraft in MR II, but the drawdown may impact upon this.

Dr. Kissinger: How will the drawdown affect the test?

Gen. Karhos: Air Force resources may be impacted.

Adm. Moorer: We need 375 spaces for the test. If we have 30 planes, we need people to take care of them and to load them, and we have to get these people from other units.

Gen. Karhos: We also have the same problem, of course, with the helicopters.

Dr. Kissinger: That's why I want to see the trade-offs. It would be helpful to get some charts, too. We must have alternative courses. I'm not challenging the present program, however, because I don't know the alternatives.

Adm. Moorer: Abrams is looking at various ways he can get the force level down to 69,000. He's examining the possibility of moving some forces to Thailand and of reducing intelligence collection capabilities. He's got a security problem because 20% of the current force

⁷ According to a January 14 memorandum from Odeen and Negroponte, briefing Kissinger for the meeting and summarizing the CIA and Defense Department papers, the STOL (Short Take Off and Landing) program was an effort to supply the GVN with 200 light, inexpensive aircraft that were useful for close air strikes and re-supply missions. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-62, SRG Meeting, Vietnam Assessment 1/17/72 (2 of 2))

is used for security purposes. He's also looking into the logistic support for the ROK troops and into logistics back loading—that is moving equipment quickly to Okinawa and Taiwan and not spending much time on it in Southeast Asia. We may have to close Cam Ranh Bay, reduce the number of advisors and cut back on FANK training. Abrams is taking a good hard look at all of this.

Dr. Kissinger: We will meet a week from today and look at all the alternatives, keeping in mind that the maximum danger is in the next four to five months. We should decide what improvements we must make, especially in regard to the ARVN, in order to get through this period.

(to Mr. Odeen) Phil, do you have anything you want to add?

Mr. Odeen: Yes, we should put particular emphasis on the alternatives for helicopters, the STOL program and interdiction in Laos.

292. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, January 21, 1972, 10:30 a.m.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

P: I was thinking about your comments on the NVN. I wonder if in the letter to the Chinese the way to handle them might be to say we have intelligence reports saying the Soviet Union is urging the NVN to launch a major attack to embarrass us prior to our visit to the People's Republic. We are making a peace proposal but other than that we will have to take actions to support our people. Get the impression that others are doing it.²

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking. All omissions are in the original.

² A message to the Chinese Government, along with a "Republic of Vietnam and United States Proposal for a Negotiated Settlement of the Indochina Conflict," were sent to Paris on January 24 under a covering letter from Haig to Walters. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 849, For the President's File—China Trip, China Exchanges) For text of the U.S. message, see *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XVII, China, 1969–1972, Document 186.

K: I asked Haig to place that argument in a sketchy way when he was there so that it was playing back to something he had received.³

P: Right.

[Omitted here is discussion of planning for Nixon's address to the Nation on Vietnam; see Document 294.]

[P:] Anything we can do to the NVN? Not in the air but SVN in Cambodia?

K: They will not do it fast enough. They have pulled their troops out of Cambodia and put them in II Corps. One way or other it will be settled by election time. If the SVN break it settles it and if they hold and weather what happens there domestically then I think it's 50–50 they will settle it before the election. They are making a scale they cannot repeat if they don't make it.

P: SVN, can we get them anything more? Tanks or anything?

K: In our withdrawal schedule the Pentagon is putting emphasis on pulling out helicopters. Many of the gun ships. We need them desperately. Change composition of forces and keep helicopters in there until May. It doesn't affect troop numbers.

P: Get that out right away. Get Laird and Moorner out of there. Do it today.

K: As soon as we hang up.

P: Moorner owes us one too. Say we want plenty of helicopters until May and let's use them.

K: I think we can handle it.

P: They have no air power and no helicopters. No reason for them to win.

K: If they suffer the same losses this year as last year in Laos then I think it will be over.

P: I think you are right. You will see Dobrynin tonight?⁴

K: Right. I will call you. It may be too late. I will place a call anyway.

P: Your line with him will be conciliatory on the big things but we cannot have the defensive. We will respond—at a level they don't expect. Let them think we will hit Haiphong.

K: I think I should warn him that we will be tough.

³ Haig traveled to Beijing January 3–10 to prepare for the President's trip in February. See *ibid.*, Documents 183–184.

⁴ See Document 293.

P: It will be interesting to see what he is bringing. A whole agenda on trade.

K: He will be conciliatory. I have that from the tone of his conversation.

P: It was interesting that when you brought up India he said let's go on from there.

K: They are guilty and they know it. They are a bunch of thugs.

P: Get Laird over. It is important to say we don't lose _____ on this. I will take some knocks. I don't mind 5 day strike.

K: The Democrats want to say it took us 4 years to lose. Then whip-saw us.

P: We will set it up well with peace proposal. Then they hit us and we respond by saying you will not drive us out that way. Maybe we will get public support this way.

K: We should and go on the defensive against the Democrats. They had on the "Today" show this morning comments by Muskie and Humphrey on military position of your speech. They only want more efficiency. They didn't attack frontally. They are all patriotic.

P: _____ if the AF gets some planes. Hit for 2 day cracks.⁵

K: Two days and stop for 2–3 days and then a day. Mix it up so opponents don't get set.

P: Really whamp on them.

⁵ Nixon is referring to plans to launch an air attack on DRV forces concentrated in Kontum Province. Documentation on the operation is in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume VIII, Vietnam, January–October 1972.

293. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, January 21, 1972, 8 p.m.–midnight.

PARTICIPANTS

Ambassador Anatoli Dobrynin
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger

The meeting lasted nearly four hours and was conducted in an atmosphere of effusive cordiality, buttressed by slugs of vodka and cans of caviar.

Dobrynin had just returned from the Soviet Union and had called me for an appointment.

[Omitted here is discussion of issues unrelated to Vietnam.]

Vietnam

I began with Vietnam. I said that as a general matter it had been difficult for us to understand Soviet behavior in the fall. We were extremely unhappy about Soviet actions prior to the India/Pakistan crisis, and we found their behavior on Vietnam also very hard to comprehend. I had talked to the Soviet Foreign Minister about Vietnam at the end of September.² We had transmitted a specific proposal. We had received a reply from the Soviet Foreign Minister³ as well as from the Vietnamese that they were ready to talk. We accepted the Vietnamese date for the meeting and three days before, it was cancelled.⁴ Since then we had not heard from them. If a Communist offensive occurred, I emphasized that we would certainly take the strongest possible action, which in turn would have effects on our relationship. It was clear that the Soviet Union might think it could embarrass us in Peking by encouraging North Vietnamese attacks now, but it paid a heavy price in our goodwill. Certainly if the Vietnam issue were removed, all other areas in our relations would make quick progress.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger 1972, Vol. IX [Pt. 2]. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting took place at the Soviet Embassy. Kissinger forwarded the memorandum of conversation to Nixon under a covering memorandum on January 28. Both memoranda have indications that Nixon saw them. The memorandum of conversation and its attachments are printed in full in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 39.

² See Document 263.

³ See, footnote 2, Document 263.

⁴ See Document 272.

Dobrynin replied that he wanted me to understand the following: First, the Soviet Union had recommended our plan to Hanoi early in October and had been under the impression that Hanoi would negotiate. Secondly, the Soviet Union had no interest in an offensive by Hanoi, because if the offensive took place now prior to the Peking summit it could be repeated prior to the Moscow summit. The last thing the Soviet Union wanted was a confrontation with the United States in the months before the Moscow summit. Thirdly, the Soviet Union believed that the war should come to an end now. But it was not prepared to bring pressure to this end. I said that, in that case the objective tendency of Soviet policy was to exacerbate the tensions and to encourage Hanoi. I pointed out that the spate of articles in the Soviet press that accompanied Haig's visit to Peking reinforced this and were taken very ill in Washington.

Dobrynin replied that if we read those articles carefully we would see that they were not directed against the United States but against China. They were placed into the Soviet newspapers on the pages reserved for Chinese affairs, and they represented an opportunity for the Soviet Union to hit back at China with some of the charges China had made against them.

With respect to the North Vietnamese behavior, Dobrynin continued, it was the impression in Moscow that what had really aborted the negotiations in the fall was the Chinese intervention. It was Moscow's impression that after my visit to Peking the Chinese raised the new U.S. proposal with the North Vietnamese and the North Vietnamese took violent exception to this. They were furious with the Chinese in any event because they believed that the Chinese had aborted their seven-point plan and that the campaign they had planned in support of their plan was destroyed by my visit to Peking, about which Hanoi had not been informed ahead of time and of which Hanoi was informed only 36 hours prior to the announcement.

When the Chinese raised our peace plan with them, Hanoi decided that it was essential that if peace is negotiated it appear as the result of Hanoi's actions and not of Great Power pressure. They scheduled a visit to Peking and did not receive full assurances. It was Moscow's impression, however, that recently they had received fuller assurances.

I told Dobrynin that, whatever the convoluted maneuvers of inter-Communist politics, the fact of the matter was that if the Soviet Union had also joined the appeal there would have been peace, so that the objective tendency of Soviet policy was to encourage a continuation of the war even if they never used words to that effect. I also stressed that if the Soviet Union were really as concerned about U.S.-Soviet rapprochement as it professed to be, it should consider that an end of the Vietnam war would remove one of the principal obstacles

to it. Dobrynin said he thought this was realized in Moscow, but it was a very difficult situation.⁵

[Omitted here is discussion of issues unrelated to Vietnam.]

⁵ Attached is a January 17 letter from Brezhnev to Nixon on U.S.-Soviet relations. On Vietnam, Brezhnev wrote: "I would like—without repeating what we have said earlier—to express once again our confidence that a basis for peaceful settlement in that area does exist. However, the actions by U.S. armed forces, especially lately, raids against the DRV can only push events in the opposite direction. Yet, Mr. President, in all times, and more recent ones included, the peoples duly appreciated not those who started or expanded a war, but those who decisively put an end to it, guided by the highest interests of their people and of peace."

294. Editorial Note

A critical part of the Nixon administration's plan to make public its private offer to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (see Document 269) in conjunction with the President's announcement of the withdrawal of 70,000 U.S. troops, was the need for South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu's support. In a January 3, 1972, backchannel message to Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker in Saigon, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry Kissinger, informed Bunker that President Nixon was considering making a troop withdrawal announcement on January 13 that would commit the United States to reduce its force levels to 69,000 by May 1 and continue the reductions to a residual force level of 35,000 by July 1. In addition, draftees would no longer serve in Vietnam. Kissinger also noted that on January 18, the President would make a speech revealing the secret negotiations between Kissinger and North Vietnamese negotiators Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy as well as publicly announcing the U.S. peace proposal made earlier to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Kissinger authorized Bunker to show Thieu the proposal for the speech and added that it was critical that Thieu not announce his intention not to seek office after a peace agreement was signed, but to resign and allow a caretaker government to organize national elections. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David Cables, 1 Jan–31 Jul 72)

The timing of the speech was also a matter of some debate in Washington. According to White House Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman, Kissinger told him on January 1 that the President was increasingly nervous about Congressional opposition to the war and wanted to make

the speech before Congress reconvened on January 18, believing that this would staunch dissent. Kissinger opposed this approach, arguing that it would only make the war the focus of the Congressional session, but the President persisted and on January 3 told Haldeman that he had chosen the evening of January 18 to make his speech. Haldeman wrote in his diary, "This he figures will be a major blockbuster on the Vietnam thing, and that it'll be especially effective because the first announcement will suck all the peaceniks out, and the second move will chop them all off." (January 1 and January 3 entries; *The Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*)

On January 4, Bunker informed Thieu about the troop withdrawal plans and, as reported in backchannel message 8 from Saigon, January 4, Thieu accepted the U.S. withdrawal figures, but wanted the United States to maintain some combat units in the residual force while the South Vietnamese were still being equipped and trained. Bunker responded that the details of the troop composition had not yet been worked out. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 872, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Washington–Saigon Consultations on President's Jan. 25, 1972, Speech)

On January 13, President Nixon announced that 70,000 U.S. troops would be withdrawn from South Vietnam over the next 3 months, bringing the troop level down to 69,000 by May 1. (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1972*, page 30)

Consultation with Thieu on the second part of the plan, the President's revelation of the secret talks and the U.S. proposal, caused more problems than the withdrawal statement. In backchannel message 9 from Saigon, January 10, Bunker wrote that he showed Thieu the proposal that Kissinger had sent him, and that Thieu was surprised that the Nixon administration had made the offer to the North Vietnamese without his prior knowledge. Bunker assured Thieu that the offer was not materially different from the one that Alexander Haig had discussed with him on September 23, although it included more specifics. Bunker recommended to Kissinger, however, that in order to forestall public criticism of Thieu, the President should note in his speech that the South Vietnamese had been consulted in advance. Thieu also expressed concern about President Nixon's plan to call for a diplomatically neutral South Vietnam, noting that he had stated many times publicly that he opposed neutrality. Thieu did, however, consent not to announce his plans to retire from public life after a treaty was signed. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 854, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. XIII)

Kissinger responded to Thieu's main concerns in a backchannel message to Bunker, January 10, indicating that the President would say

that the administration got Thieu's concurrence before submitting the eight-point proposal to the North Vietnamese and he would broaden the statements dealing with neutrality to include all countries in Indochina. (Ibid., Box 872, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Encore Sept. 71–15 Feb. 72, President's Speech January 25, 1972)

On January 14, Thieu sent a memorandum to Bunker, detailing his concerns with the proposal and complaining that he had not had enough time to analyze it. He wrote:

"Since it is the first time I saw this document, and moreover it is a text of a 'statement of principles ready to be signed' and comprising many points related to the global problem of the cessation of the conflict, the restoration of peace in Indochina and the shaping of the political future of South Vietnam; therefore I think it will require more time for careful examination."

Thieu added, "I affirm the goodwill for serious negotiations and the genuine and eager desire to have a peace settlement through a negotiated way rather than through military way of the GVN," but had the following warning:

"If President Nixon still intends to make public the text of this 'statement of principles' on January 18, then I think that I will not be able to jointly release the full text of the 'statement of principles.' On the contrary, on that day, I will only tell the people of Viet-Nam that I have another peace initiative on the political solution of South Viet-Nam through election as mentioned in my July 11, 1969 proposal in order to break through the peace talks and to show maximum good will. That is, after the end of the war and after a peace with guarantee is restored, I will voluntarily withdraw in order for the people of Viet-Nam to reelect a new president and vice president." (Text sent in backchannel message 14 from Saigon, January 15; *ibid.*, Box 854, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. XIII)

Bunker commented that Thieu's chief concerns were as follows: The Vietnamese would fear that the United States would withdraw even before all of the conditions in the proposal were fulfilled; that "none of his people are aware of these developments and the surfacing of the proposal will come as a complete surprise;" and that "he is being pushed too rapidly." Bunker asked if the President could delay his speech a few days, "so that Thieu will not have the feeling that he is being rushed." (Backchannel message 13 from Saigon, January 15; *ibid.*, Box 869, For the President's Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David Cables, 1 Jan–31 July 1972)

In backchannel message WHS 2006 to Saigon, January 15, Kissinger wrote to Bunker that "in view of Thieu's concerns, the President has decided to delay his address to January 25 in order to permit full consideration of the issues raised by Thieu." (*Ibid.*) In a de-

tailed response to Thieu's concerns, Kissinger wrote to Bunker, "We believe it is essential that we have mutual understanding with Thieu and a coordinated public line before proceeding," and indicated that the Nixon administration would be willing to work out the differences with him, which he viewed as manageable. He added, "In the meantime, before January 25, we must all ensure that absolute secrecy be maintained." Kissinger instructed Bunker to "tell Thieu frankly that we regret having passed proposal to the other side without checking with him first," but that "in the interest of time the proposal was submitted to the other side before the November meeting which never occurred" and that "we would, of course, have consulted with Thieu fully if meeting had taken place." He added: "We had assumed that Thieu's agreement in principle to proposal warranted this preliminary action, but on second thought, it is obvious that we erred in judgment." Kissinger asked Bunker to assure Thieu that his government would have to be completely satisfied with the final settlement before the United States agreed to it. But Kissinger included a warning of his own:

"You should remind Thieu—as he is no doubt aware—that withdrawal of U.S. forces will continue in any event and that timeframe visualized for our withdrawal under the agreed statement of principles approximates our troop withdrawal schedule in any event under the Vietnamization track. The only difference is the residual force and air power which we will hold if there is no agreement. We have a much better chance of doing so vis-à-vis Congress if we make this proposal and it is turned down. On the other hand, if our proposal is accepted, the other side would have agreed to principle of cease-fire which would make much less risky completion of our total withdrawal."

Kissinger summarized the situation as follows:

"If we don't go with our joint proposal we face prospect of interacting enemy offensives, domestic pressures in election year, congressional restrictions and possible enemy diplomatic ploys which could bring us to straight withdrawal for prisoner deal in any event. If we do go with our joint proposal, we take public offensive before enemy attacks and congressional moves, and put on table a proposal that moves U.S. forces out essentially no faster than they would anyway, and under circumstance which would greatly enhance our ability to maintain necessary materiel and air support. We are under no illusions that other side is likely to agree to our proposal. But our surfacing it at this time could prove to be essential factor in allowing us to continue our support for the GVN." (Backchannel message WHS 2007 to Saigon, January 15; *ibid.*)

Bunker reported in backchannel message 16 from Saigon, January 17, that after discussing Kissinger's message with Thieu, the South Vietnamese President appreciated President Nixon's decision to delay the

speech. Thieu claimed his principal concern had been “to determine how to present the proposal here to make sure that what he says will have the best possible effect and will neutralize criticism.” (Ibid.) Both Thieu and Kissinger agreed to exchange drafts of the speeches in advance. (Backchannel message from Kissinger to Bunker, January 19; *ibid.*)

Kissinger sent a draft of the President’s speech to Bunker in backchannel message WHS 2011 to Saigon, (Ibid.) Bunker reported in backchannel message 22 from Saigon, January 22, that Thieu again had a host of questions and concerns. Thieu did not provide his draft to Bunker until the early morning of January 25—the evening of January 24 in Washington—and Kissinger raised his own concern that while Thieu would announce that he would resign after a peace treaty was signed and allow a caretaker government to oversee elections, he had left the text ambiguous whether he would run in the subsequent elections. Kissinger’s comments are in backchannel message WHS 2014, January 25; *ibid.* The text of Thieu’s speech is in backchannel message 26 from Saigon, January 24; *ibid.*, Box 854, For the President’s Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. XIII.

In the hours leading up to the speech, the two sides worked out their differences in a flurry of backchannel messages between Bunker and Kissinger. Most of these messages are *ibid.*, and *ibid.*, Box 869, For the President’s Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Cables, 1 Jan–31 Jul 72. President Nixon delivered his speech in a television address on the evening of January 25. The text is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1972*, pages 100–106.

Bunker sent the final text of President Thieu’s speech to Kissinger in backchannel message 33 from Saigon, January 25. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President’s Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Cables, 1 Jan–31 Jul 72) Thieu delivered it in a radio address a half hour after President Nixon finished his speech.

Documentation on the planning and drafting of the Nixon speech is *ibid.*, Box 125, Vietnam Subject Files, President’s 11/12/71 Troop Withdrawal Announcement, and *ibid.*, White House Special Files, President’s Personal Files, Box 72, Tuesday, 1/25/72, Vietnam Speech.

295. Message From the United States to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam¹

Washington, undated.

It is with great reluctance, but with no reasonable alternative, that the United States is revealing publicly the secret negotiations with the North Vietnamese.

Over three months ago, the U.S. side transmitted a comprehensive new proposal designed to bring about an early negotiated settlement of the conflict. This proposal built upon the progress made in previous meetings and specifically took account of remaining North Vietnamese concerns. Since then, the North Vietnamese side has failed to respond to the proposal or agreed to meet at an authoritative level to discuss it. In the meantime, public accusations continue to be made that the United States refuses to negotiate seriously. This has left the United States no choice but to demonstrate its attitude toward negotiations and seek a response to its proposal.

The United States side, as it said in its message of November 19, 1971,² continues to seek “to bring a rapid end to the war on a basis just for all parties.” It repeats its willingness to consider alternative ideas put forward by the North Vietnamese side. It stands behind everything that it has said in the private discussions, both its general attitude toward a peaceful settlement and its specific proposals.

The United States is ready to negotiate on the basis of the proposal outlined by the President in his speech.³ The President is prepared to send Dr. Kissinger back to Paris to resume negotiations with Special Adviser Le Duc Tho, or any other appropriate official from Hanoi, together with Minister Xuan Thuy.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1040, Files for the President, Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David 1972, May 2 to October 7, 1972. No classification marking. Walters reported that, pursuant to his instructions, he delivered the message to Vo Van Sung at 10 a.m. on January 26. Walters read the text to him in French and Vo said he would transmit it to Hanoi. Vo stated that the DRV believed that Nixon’s speech the day before was contrary to the understandings they had with Kissinger on the confidentiality of the secret talks. (Ibid., Box 872, For the President’s Files—Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Encore Sept. 71–15 Feb. 72, President’s Speech January 25, 1972)

² See Document 272.

³ See Document 294. The proposal the President put forward comprised the points given to the North Vietnamese in Paris on October 11; see Document 269. He added that President Thieu and Vice President Huong would resign one month before the new election.

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